CHILDREN OF THE SHADOW

BY
ISABEL
C.
CLARKE

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CHILDREN OF THE SHADOW

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Carina," etc.

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New York, Cincinnati, Chicago
BENZIGER BROTHERS
1924

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Printed in the United States of America

NOV 29 1924
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Rcd. Jan. 2,

Affectionately Dedicated

to

PRINCESS GESINÉ DORIA-PAMPHILY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE
I A Meeting and Its Consequences 9
II The Return of Eustace Wingrave 30
III The Only Surviving Son 47
IV Undercurrents 60
V The Shadow 74
VI Forbidden Fruit 90
VII Arranging a Marriage 118
VIII Refusal 137
IX The Shadow Deepens 156
X Conflict 176
XI Sursum Corda 197
XII Lady Pendre Remembers 214
XIII At Glen Cottage 230
XIV Reappearance of Martin Sedgwick 255
XV An Awkward Situation 282
XVI Flight 307
XVII Two Ceremonies 331
XVIII Anxiety 348
XIX In Rome 362
XX "Habemus Papam" 381
XXI Light on the Shadow 396
XXII The Lifting of the Shadow 411

CHILDREN OF THE SHADOW

CHAPTER I

A Meeting and Its Consequences

1

A WIDE blue ribbon of water divided the two shores that lay low and shining and almost treeless opposite to each other. The mud flats were iridescent, in color a warm brown, but shot with rainbow hues and broken by long narrow slits of turquoise above which innumerable gulls flew and cried.

The ribbon widened at last very beautifully into a sea that was hardly less blue. The long lines of surf were visible. So much space of sea and sky with the clouds forming Alp-like barriers on the horizon! . . . Northward were black clouds boldly castellated, suggesting linked magical fortresses. The wide sky was painted faintly turquoise, a pure almost impalpable color. As the wind dropped, the clouds looked like homing golden birds, flying slowly as if they had come from very far and were a little tired.

The southern shore was flat and desolate as it neared the water. Its few trees grew aslant at an almost comic angle as if beaten by the ferocious gales that tormented that coast in winter. Here and there some lines of low squalid houses clinging together as if for protection, were grouped close to the gaunt hideous machinery, the unlovely mounds of slack, the tall rosy brick-built chimneys, that indicated the presence of a coal mine.

Afar to the south, high wooded hills looked down upon that lonely flat coast, made almost beautiful in the February sunlight by reason of its delicate rainbow hues, suggesting indeed to traveled eyes the Italian Maremma in winter.

At the extreme end of the Pendre woods—so far eastward that from that point the river and not the sea was visible—there stood a young girl. She was about eighteen years old, but she was so slightly fashioned that with her short cut hair and skirts to her knees she looked hardly more than a child. Her face was small, too, like a child's, and had something of a child's eager winsome expression. The eyes were big and dark, and the hair, that barely reached her neck, was dark, too, and very thick.

She walked up and down on the sodden grass. In her hand she held a little nosegay of snowdrops and early celandines; the silver and pale gold of the blossoms gave a touch of color and light to her dark winter raiment.

It was half an hour since the train from Chester had passed, and long ago its blue smoke had melted into the wind-swept sky. He could not be here yet, but he would surely be here very soon. Vicky Wingrave consulted the watch on her wrist. As she did so, her face assumed a rather serious, obstinate expression. There was even a hint of defiance and mutiny about the compressed lips. Well, she had often enough defied the Powers in her short tempestuous life, but to-day's act of rebellion was a more serious thing. She had embarked upon it deliberately, with a cold, determined courage that almost astonished herself. It was not a child's heedless rebellion, it was a woman's first effort to strike a blow in her own defense. . . .

Looked at like that, it was of course alarming. One couldn't imagine what the outcome would be, supposing it were discovered. Vicky never minimized, even to herself, the intolerable perspicuity of her father, the first Lord Pendre of Pendre (or Pendry, as it was written in ancient documents, consequently nothing annoyed the present holder of the title so much as having his name pronounced as if it rhymed with fender!).

Vicky could never remember that a single one of her childish delinquencies had escaped that eagle glance. Where she was concerned, he had shown himself shrewd, vigilant and merciless. But perhaps never so merciless as on that day, now nearly two years ago, when he had banished Martin Sedgwick from Pendre.

Nevertheless, he had reason on his side. His daughter was very young, almost a child, and unformed for her years. Martin, badly wounded in the War, did not then know if he would ever completely recover, or whether his prolonged sick-leave would finally merge into compulsory retirement from the army. His private means were small, and Vicky was the daughter of a man of immense wealth. How much Lord Pendre knew of the details of her poor little romance, Vicky never even tried to discover. Bereft of Martin, with her favorite brother Eustace still in Iraq, she was too desolate and miserable to inquire.

Suddenly a figure emerged from the woods to the east, and, seeing Vicky, ran swiftly toward her. Tall, lithe, young, with flaxen hair and very bright blue eyes, Martin was beautifully typical of Anglo-Saxon youth.

Vicky put out her hand and felt it tightly grasped. She was trembling now from head to foot.

Over there on the mud flats the narrow turquoise pools were vividly blue. The air seemed full of silver, flashing wings as the sea-gulls circled above them. She was alone with Martin, and she lifted her face to receive his kiss.

He pulled her hand comfortably within his arm, and they walked a few paces to the right and entered the wood. There they sat upon a bank heaped high with brown crisp leaves, through which slim strong green sheaths were thrusting their impetuous way.

It was very still. Through a break in the brown boughs they could see the pale, shining line of the river between its two stretches of iridescent sand. Beyond, low green hills lifted their faint silhouettes against the pale, pure blue of the spring sky.

They sat there for some minutes in silence.

"I was so afraid something would stop you from coming," said Vicky, at last.

She had the sense now of being inadequate, too lacking in experience, to deal with a situation at once so simple and so complex. There had been a certain element of childish daring mixed with her share in the escapade. But Martin was much older; he had passed his twenty-seventh year, and his face showed her that he was resolute and serious. She found herself suddenly afraid, not of her father, but of Martin.

The months that had passed since their last meeting had not been an easy time for him. There had been at first an interchange of letters—Vicky's letters were rather wonderful things—she had a gift of self-expression that had astonished him until he suddenly realized that it was the outcome of her repressed condition. Lord Pendre had in an evil hour discovered the correspondence. Vicky was in disgrace. Martin received his own little bundle of letters, with a furious addition from Lord Pendre accusing him of having violated all the laws of hospitality by making love to his daughter, who was still in the schoolroom, and forbidding him either to approach her or write to her again. And now, somehow, the impossible had happened—for an hour or two they were together, here in the Pendre woods, where their little romance had first been inaugurated.

"And I never thought you'd come," said Martin, softly.

He could imagine the difficulties she must have combated to come hither alone. And always he had been afraid that she might in the end shrink from the risks involved. To see her there, pale, determined, almost callous in her courage, increased her value in his eyes. He only wished that it had been possible to take her away forever from all risks, all danger. . . . He drew her a little closer to him so that her head rested lightly on his shoulder. Vicky was conscious of something at once tender and protective in his attitude. His strangeness seemed to diminish. It was like being with Eustace, only with an added excitement she could not analyze.

Martin was watching her. She was more beautiful than she had been eighteen months ago; she was more womanly too. She made him think of some wild white woodland flower, tender and supple but full of an almost stern life. He loved her, but this afternoon he was bitterly conscious of Lord Pendre's point of view. Vicky was so very young and inexperienced, she had no knowledge of the world, she answered to the call of his love like some shy homing bird. It had been so fatally easy to teach her to love him. And now he could do nothing but leave her here while he went to join his regiment in Malta. It didn't seem fair, and it was certainly not wise.

"Well, what's it been like?" he asked, smiling at her.

"Putrid," said Vicky, laconically. "The only nice thing I've got to look forward to after to-day is that Eustie is coming back. We expect him the day after to-morrow. And he's going to retire. I can hardly believe it. We only had the telegram a few days ago."

"I'm so glad for your sake. You'll have someone—"

"Yes. I do hope and trust that he won't fall in love with Pamela!"

"My dear child, how you do rush off to meet possible disasters!"

"But it's so likely, isn't it? Dad wants it, I'm certain. It's sickening to see the way she twists him round her little finger."

"I don't know Eustace well, but I shouldn't think he was the kind of man to be taken with that cold statue."

"One never knows. Phip was," said Vicky, ruefully.

"My dear—she was out to kill something!"

"I suppose she was. But look at Dad—how she's got round him. Pamela's got some queer power. I'm afraid of her."

"Well, anyhow, you must do your best to prevent it from happening," said Martin.

"I pity Eustace," said the girl, suddenly; "he'll hate it all so now. Being the eldest son—going into the works—knowing he's got to be Lord Pendre one of these days. Unless, of course, he dies before Dad."

"He's got lots of time to get accustomed to the idea," said Martin, who only wished for wealth because it could bring him nearer to his heart's desire. Not only for a snatched hour like the present, but permanently, till life itself ceased. "Some people wouldn't think it such a bad billet."

"Eustie wants so dreadfully to be free," said Vicky. "And we used to plan to go away together—to the colonies, perhaps—and live in some wild place where there was no one to grumble at us, or scold us, or forbid us to do the things we wanted to do."

"But I think I should try to prevent your going off with Eustace," he reminded her. "I want you myself, Vicky. I want you very badly. And if I had half Eustace' wealth we shouldn't have to wait another week."

She drew a little away, and looked at him. He was not smiling now, and his fair face was set and stern. With Vicky, love was enough, and if she could only have seen Martin thus for an hour or two every day, she would have been perfectly contented. Now she realized that this no longer sufficed for him. He was suffering because of the continued separation. The uncertainty of the future dimmed even his pleasure at being with her now. He wanted more than love. Marriage, with a home to be shared by Vicky. . . . Children perhaps. . . . Vicky's elder sister Barbara was married and had a little boy. Did Martin really want all of that? The unknown held terrors for Vicky, but this hour of simple love was very sweet and satisfying. She wished that Martin could be contented too.

"When do you start, Martin?" she asked.

"Friday. I shall want to write to you, Vicky—I shall want to hear from you! How on earth are we to do it?"

Vicky shook her head.

"I must ask Eustie. He might think of a plan. He might write to you even if I can't. I don't think I could face a row like the last." Her face flushed. "I'm afraid of Dad, Martin. Mortally afraid."

"When I first came to Pendre I thought you must all be the most madly happy people in the world, except for losing Phip," said Martin, thoughtfully. "You had everything. And now—I think I pity you more than anyone, Vicky. You and your mother."

"Oh, Mummie's happy enough," said Vicky, easily.

"Happy? I'd never call her that," he said, gazing straight before him at the flashing wings of the sea-gulls.

"She never seems to mind much what happens. It doesn't affect her. He's awfully decent to her," said Vicky.

They sat there in silence for some little time longer. Vicky wanted to savor the perfection of the hour; she could do this best if they didn't talk, but just sat there, their hands linked, while she was conscious of a nearness and sympathy that permeated all her being. It could only last at best a very short time. Soon she would have to return to Pendre, slinking in like a thief, afraid of being observed. And Martin would have to walk back down the hill and wait at the little wayside station for the train. He could not risk staying till a later one, and if Vicky were out beyond a certain hour her absence would inevitably be discovered.

"Vicky, swear you'll marry me. Don't let anyone come between us!"

His voice was hoarse, and his blue eyes were very bright with a kind of steely, menacing brightness.

"Of course I'm going to marry you. The only fear is that you may get tired of me. I'm so young—you're sure to meet heaps of prettier, cleverer girls." She clung to him a little now. "*I* should never let anyone come between us."

"I used to think that blighter Ernest Soames was beginning to fall in love with you!"

"Mr. Soames? Why, he's forty—he's nearly as old as Mummie. As if I'd marry him!"

She laughed. Martin must indeed be jealous to entertain such a possibility as that for a moment.

"Now you're running to meet disasters," she said.

His face relaxed a little. "I'm so glad to hear you say that. But I'm sure Lord Pendre's thought of it."

"Oh, you're quite mistaken, Martin. You really are. He did want to marry Barbara once, you know, but she wouldn't look at him."

Martin struggled to his feet. That particular ghost seemed to be satisfactorily laid, but to go away for a year, perhaps longer, leaving Vicky at a highly impressionable age, was simply in his eyes to court danger. He didn't doubt her love, but she was a mere child; she hardly knew the meaning of the word.

He put out his hands and she crept into his arms.

"Vicky—Vicky—darling . . ." she heard him murmur brokenly.

"Martin . . ."

He tore himself away at last and sped down the hill. Vicky stood there, pale, motionless, watching that retreating figure. She felt spent and exhausted with emotion, from that sustained, fierce embrace. She went back into the wood, sat on the bank of dried leaves and wept softly.

2

Dusk had fallen when Martin reached the little station, that stood almost a stone's throw from the shore. It was not yet quite time for the train, and he paced the platform while the wind, which had now risen, howled in the telegraph poles and scourged his face with a rough though friendly violence. But he did not heed it. His thoughts were full of Vicky—the wonder-child whom he had learned to love during those long weeks of arduous convalescence he had spent at Pendre nearly two years ago. He had come there as Phip's friend—he had been with Phip when he was killed, had brought his body back at great personal risk. And for this reason Lord Pendre had invited him to stay with them after he left the hospital. Vicky was in the schoolroom then, in the care of Miss Brigstocke, a kind elderly duenna who was very devoted to her. Miss Brigstocke had realized what was going on even before the two principal actors in the little drama had understood whither they were traveling. She had looked on and said nothing, and had nearly lost her place in consequence. The incipient love-affair was discovered and quenched. Martin was banished. The chief of the storm had fallen upon Vicky's frail but rebellious little figure.

Martin longed to know if she had reached home in safety. Perhaps somehow she would contrive to send him word. But she was closely watched. Lord Pendre's vigilance was never relaxed. Having discovered where danger lay, he was the last man to minimize it. It would be very difficult for Vicky to let him know how she had fared. . . .

Presently the train came slowly in sight. The great black engine puffed its way into the station. Doors were flung open, and from a first-class carriage a tall agile form stepped down. The flickering lamps revealed a dark and swarthy face, black-bearded, with somber eyes. For a moment the two men stood face to face. Their eyes met, the black as well as the blue afire with anger.

Lord Pendre gave no sign of recognition beyond that steady disdainful stare, enveloping, contemptuous.

Martin pulled open the door and got into the train.

"Of course he's bound to find out now," he thought, uncomfortably.

All of a sudden he felt afraid for Vicky. This man had a temper that was a byword in the neighborhood, and all her short life he had wreaked his wrath upon Vicky. As a little child, he had put down her tendency to mutiny and rebellion with an iron hand. But it was nonsense—he couldn't ill-treat her now, or subject her to physical violence. Nevertheless Martin shrank a little before the thought of their meeting this evening. Lord Pendre would guess that he was little likely to leave the neighborhood without communicating with or perhaps seeing Vicky. She would be questioned and interrogated till the truth was forced from her. . . .

The train moved out of the station, and across the dark mud flats and the shining strip of river Martin could see the lights shining in friendly groups from the opposite shore. He went to the other window and looked out. The Pendre woods were leaning dark and somber against the clear pale evening sky.

3

Lord Pendre drove back home in his swift motor-car through the darkened lanes and roads, his thoughts full of Vicky and Martin Sedgwick. At first it seemed impossible to believe that his daughter could so far have defied and disobeyed him as to make an actual assignation with Sedgwick. That would constitute an almost incredible demand upon her courage. She might not love her father, but Lord Pendre did flatter himself that she was afraid of him. And yet—and yet—there had been always something elusive about Vicky—something that slipped past him, and could not be held or dominated, or even ultimately subdued. Her mother's spirit, perhaps. It did not suit Lord Pendre to examine the matter too closely. But as he reflected upon it now, his harsh face grew a little cruel. Vicky must learn sooner or later that he was her master.

The lights of Pendre were shining as he approached the house, which looked like an immense pile of amorphous stone in the darkness that had now fallen. As he stepped out, briskly despite his sixty odd years, he gave an order to the chauffeur for the following day and then passed into the great hall with its blazing fire.

As a rule he always sought his wife directly he returned home, and from habit he was on the point of going into the library, where she would almost certainly be found. Suddenly he checked himself, went through a door leading to a passage on the left, mounted a secondary staircase and entered the schoolroom.

Miss Brigstocke was sitting by the fire knitting. She put down her work and rose as he came in. She looked at him inquiringly. His visits to her were very rare, and she had known that he had gone to St. David's Bay that morning, traveling thither by train. He had left Pendre quite early.

He was rather a formidable-looking person with his black hair and beard, both slightly sprinkled with grey, his flashing black eyes under their broad dark eyebrows. Never in the least handsome, there was something titanic about him which gave him a certain, almost sinister, attraction. He was tall, very broad-shouldered, with a suggestion of overwhelming strength. Not one of his four children had inherited that mighty physique, indeed the two younger ones, Eustace and Vicky, were rather below middle height.

He glanced round the room as if to ascertain that they were alone, then he said:

"Where's Vicky?"

"She's in her room, Lord Pendre," answered Miss Brigstocke, becoming aware from the tone of his voice that he was in what the servants called "one of his rages."

"In her room? How long's she been there?"

Miss Brigstocke glanced nervously at the clock and then said: "Since tea, I think."

"Was she out this afternoon?" He continued his cross-questioning with increased ferocity.

"Yes. In the woods."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I've got a cold—I was sorry I couldn't go with her. She wanted a walk." The sentences came hurriedly, unconvincingly.

"Did you know that she'd gone to meet Sedgwick?" he demanded.

Miss Brigstocke flushed darkly. She had not known it, and the suggestion came to her as a disagreeable surprise. Vicky had entreated her not to ask any questions. But there had been something secret, some mystery, attached to that walk of hers, made as soon as luncheon was over.

She hadn't been back more than half an hour, and she had come in looking very white and exhausted, as if she had emerged from some rather shattering emotional crisis. She had swallowed a cup of tea and then gone to her room. She wanted to rest, she said, before dinner.

"No, I'd no idea of it," said Miss Brigstocke, after a brief pause, during which she felt her heart sink into her boots.

"Well, then, she's been meeting him this afternoon," he said. "I saw him myself at the station. He got into the train as I got out. But he saw me. The fellow looked like a thief, so I knew he'd been prowling round here after Vicky."

Miss Brigstocke was silent. There was really nothing to be said, and she had the feeling, too, that any interpolation from herself might make matters much worse.

"I'm not going to have it!" he said, raising his voice a little.

"I've got very different views for Vicky. I thought she was too much of a child to think about marriage, but if she's been meeting that man in Pendre woods, I will soon arrange something for her."

He set his lips in a hard straight line.

"I'm very sorry . . . I can't believe she did meet him. She knows your wishes so well," murmured Miss Brigstocke, soothingly.

"Well, she may have done it this once, but she won't do it again in a hurry. And, Miss Brigstocke—you seem to have forgotten the talk we had once before. You failed to look after her then, and you've failed again now. I can't trust you to exercise that supervision which is so necessary in Vicky's case. I'm afraid you must regard your engagement with us as terminated. From to-morrow if you please—or, say, the day after. I always intended to give you a pension and I shall still do so."

He went out of the room.

4

In a Slav vendetta the avenger does not attack the person upon whom he wishes to retaliate. His methods are more subtle, if a trifle more oblique. He injures, therefore—slays if possible—that one most beloved by the enemy upon whom he would wreak his vengeance.

It was not in Lord Pendre's power to injure or slay Martin Sedgwick, nor to subject his daughter to such drastic punishment as parents in less civilized times are alleged to have used. But in sending Miss Brigstocke peremptorily away, he struck a side-blow at Vicky that he knew would both grieve and pain her.

Upon leaving Miss Brigstocke, who restrained her tears until he was well out of the room, he went down to the library. His wife was still sitting there with the tea-things in front of her. She was reading. Her face was curiously passive, with its dark grey eyes, its pale pure outlines, the thick brown hair growing so close to her brow that she always wore it dressed as simply as possible.

"Giselda!" he said.

She turned her head quickly, aware from the tone of his voice that something was amiss.

"What is it, Hugo?"

"Vicky has been out alone meeting Sedgwick!"

The book slipped from her hand and fell with a little crash to the floor. She left it lying there.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I saw the blighter getting into the train as I got out. He saw me too. I knew from his face what he'd been after. Meeting me must have been one of the nastiest surprises of his life!"

He sat down in an armchair on the other side of the big fireplace, looking very grim and purposeful.

"But that doesn't prove anything," she said slowly. "Unless, of course, you've seen Vicky?"

"I haven't seen her. Miss Brigstocke says she's resting. I'll talk to her presently. In the meantime I've given Miss Brigstocke notice to quit. She's here to keep an eye on Vicky, and as she can't do that she'd better go."

Lady Pendre looked at her husband, aghast.

"Are you serious, Hugo? You've sent Miss Brigstocke away after all these years? Ten years! . . ."

There was now a faint but definite reproach in her voice.

"In my long business career I have always found it as essential to get rid of the useless people as to keep the efficient ones," he observed sententiously.

"And, then, you don't even know if they did meet—Vicky and Martin," she remonstrated.

"I shall jolly soon find that out when I have my little talk with Vicky."

He had finished his tea, replacing the cup on the table.

Lady Pendre shivered. If Vicky really had—! But no, it didn't seem possible. She was far too much in awe of her father to embark upon such a course of wilful rebellion. She knew exactly what he thought of Martin's pretentions. And, surely, it was unlike Martin too—proud, fastidious, slightly disdainful—to return after the humiliating rebuff he had received not two years ago.

Another aspect of the case struck her. Their love was perhaps too strong—too firmly established a thing—to permit of their accepting this arbitrary and enforced separation without resistance. It might be that it was too vital a thing, too fierce in its hold upon them. But she had never questioned Vicky on the subject, and she did not intend to do so now.

"I hope you'll find that you've been mistaken, Hugo," she said at last. "And in any case—please let there be as little fuss as possible. I mean I'd rather Vicky wasn't upset now . . . just when we're expecting Eustace home. I'd like him to find things peaceable and harmonious."

"My dear, it's impossible to pass this over in silence. Vicky has to be taught. I know she's very difficult to manage, but I can always make her obey. I won't have her running off to the woods to meet this young man—it's hardly respectable. Supposing one of our neighbors—Soames, for instance—had seen her? What would he have thought?"

"Does it matter so much what Mr. Soames thinks?"

"It matters to me very much indeed." He rose, and moved toward the door. "I shall send for Vicky to come down to my study. She must be quite rested by this time."

5

Vicky received her father's message not without alarm. So she had been discovered, and in a sense it was almost a relief to her, so keenly did she dislike anything that savored of intrigue or deceit.

Her father by his harsh treatment of her had done his best to destroy that charming frankness of hers, but he had not as yet quite succeeded. Her first thought was, "I'm glad he's found out something. He was bound to, sooner or later."

She got up, put on her dress, and went quickly down the stairs. It was not until her fingers touched the handle of the study door that a wave of fear swept over her. She had never felt so frightened before. Her father was waiting for her in there. She was deeply, bitterly conscious of his power over her. She thought of him as of some harsh autocratic figure of destiny. And he had decreed that she should never see Martin or love him or marry him.

But the thought of Martin gave her courage, the touch of his hands that still seemed to linger upon hers, the hard strength of his arms, his set stern face. These two men were fighting for the possession of her. The knowledge made her feel very small and weak and inadequate.

She opened the door and stood trembling upon the threshold.

"Come in and shut the door," commanded Lord Pendre.

Vicky obeyed. Her knees were trembling, they seemed too weak to support her. There was something in the psalms, wasn't there, about one's bones turning to water? . . .

She came a step nearer and laid her hand, for support, upon the back of a chair. If Lord Pendre had ever known pity, he must surely have felt it now. But that suave emotion had never touched his heart. People—sensible people—didn't require compassion. He himself would have regarded it as an insult.

"I met Sedgwick at the station," he began blandly; "I presume he came down to see you? I am going to ask you not to lie to me. It would be useless."

"I've never lied to you," said Vicky, in a strange hoarse little voice. "He did come here to see me. He's going to Malta at the end of the week. It was our only chance. You can kill me if you like!" she went on, with sudden passion, and emboldened by the conviction that Martin did truly love her. "But I shan't care, now that I've seen him again!"

"You have seen him for the last time, so make the most of it," was her father's retort. "I'm not going to have my daughter running out to meet young men in the woods. And I shall write and tell Sedgwick that I won't have him skulking about my property. Do you understand?"

He rose now and stood close to her. In height she did not reach his shoulder, and at that moment she looked a mere slip of a girl, hardly more than a child.

At first she thought he was going to strike her a crashing blow such as she had often suffered at his hands. But he only laid his heavy hand rather brutally on her thin shoulder and held her as if in a vice.

It was to show her, perhaps, that he still possessed a physical mastery over her, that he intended to govern her, and force her to submit to his will.

"The first result of your conduct is that Miss Brigstocke's got to go. If she can't look after you, there's no use in keeping her. She assures me that she knew nothing, but that's no excuse. She ought to have known. I've sent her away. So you see that you bring suffering on other people too by your disobedience and rebellion."

"You've sent Briggy away?" she exclaimed, almost as her mother had done. "Briggy, who's been here . . . through everything? You can't possibly be so cruel!"

Beneath his thick beard she could see that he was faintly smiling.

"Briggy, as you call her, is a sentry found asleep at her post. They get short shrift, you know."

The oblique vendetta had not missed its quarry. If anyone in the world besides Eustace had Vicky's confidence it was Miss Brigstocke. And she on her side regarded her pupil with the tenderest, loyalest affection. The punishment would fall with nice apportionment upon the two.

He felt her form quiver beneath his iron hand.

"Oh, you are cruel!" she breathed, her eyes and cheeks flaming.

The hand tightened its grasp of her.

"I advise you for your own sake not to speak to me like that!"

She broke free from him then with a supreme effort, sudden, impulsive.

"You can't prevent my marrying Martin. We have promised to marry each other. He's going away now, but when he comes back——!"

"When he comes back he will probably find you very happily married to someone else!"

"I will never, never marry anyone but Martin."

Lord Pendre went back to his writing-table.

"You can go now," he said.

She got as far as the door, and then, flying back to him, flung herself on her knees beside him.

"Dad—don't send Briggy away. She is so happy here—she loves us all so much. If I've brought it on her punish me, not Briggy . . ." The tears were pouring down her face.

Lord Pendre was annoyed. He disliked scenes unless he conducted them himself, and then they were not without savor but were evidence of his own skill and strength.

"Miss Brigstocke will leave us the day after to-morrow." His voice had an iron sound.

"What—the very day Eustie comes?"

"That makes no difference. Get up at once and don't behave like a baby, or I shall put you out of the room."

Vicky did not move. She gazed at her father with a strange mixture of curiosity and repugnance. Was he human? Did her mother love him? Why did he single her out as the special victim of his harshness and violence? Was there any particular reason that she should appear almost repulsive in his eyes? She couldn't be altogether hateful, since Eustace and Martin and Miss Brigstocke, and even perhaps her mother, all cared for her in their several ways. The fault therefore couldn't be wholly with herself.

Something in her face aroused his sudden anger. He rose, dragged her to her feet with rough violence, and said:—

"Go up to your room, and don't let me see you again to-night. People should learn to accept the consequences of their own folly without whimpering."

Vicky went out of the room. She had the sense of having been trampled upon by some heavy weight that in its passing had crushed her. She was not crying now. Her heart felt very cold and hard as a stone.

6

At a little distance from the study door she saw her mother standing in the passage. So she had been waiting for her. The thought gave her a pang that was not wholly joy nor yet altogether pain. She ran up to her.

"Mummie dear—do try to stop him from sending poor Briggy away! He says she's to go the day after to-morrow—the very day Eustie is to arrive. And you know how she's been longing to see him. . . ."

Lady Pendre stroked back the dark hair from her daughter's burning forehead. She had spent this last half hour in an anguish of suspense.

"I can't do anything, Vicky."

"But you could say it wasn't her fault that I went to meet Martin! She didn't know anything. I didn't tell her on purpose. It's a shame to punish her . . ."

"I'm very sorry, Vicky. But why do you go against him? You always come off worst, don't you? You knew there would be trouble if he discovered you'd been to meet Martin."

"I counted the cost," said Vicky resolutely. "And I came to the conclusion it was worth anything to see Martin again, no matter what happened to me afterward. You see, he's going abroad almost at once and it was our very last chance." She made the avowal with perfect simplicity. "If only it hadn't fallen upon poor Briggy—and just now!"

"Yes, it's a pity it's happened just now with Eustace coming back. But you must try and be as cheerful as possible for his sake, Vicky. He's coming home for the first time—as the only surviving son—the heir." Her voice dropped a little and did not seem perfectly under control. "There'll be difficulties, of course—he won't find it easy just at first. We must all help him." She looked down at her daughter, with grave pity in her eyes. "You mustn't think I'm not sorry about Martin," she went on quietly. "If you had asked my advice I think I should have urged you to postpone seeing him. Did it mean so much?"

There was a little silence, then Vicky said:

"I can't quite tell. I suppose I thought it would be rather a lark. . . . But Martin was very serious—he wants to marry me. He won't be satisfied with just caring—just loving."

"And you would have been satisfied with just that?"

"I think so. Now at least. Getting married sounds so horribly grown-up, and I'm not even out yet. But Martin's so much older; of course, he looks at things differently."

"I advise you to give up thinking of him for the present. You're very young—you may change. And, as you say, he's going abroad. Just for the present perhaps you'd better obey." She looked at her almost appealingly.

Vicky crept closer to her mother.

"Dad frightens me so," she whispered. "It's terrible when he's angry . . ."

"Then don't make him angry. Isn't that the simplest way?"

"It'll be a triumph for Pamela when poor Briggy goes!"

Lady Pendre was secretly astonished. "But, my dear child, what business is it of Pamela's?"

"Oh, I heard her say once it was absurd to keep that useless old woman here and give her the two best rooms in the house," answered Vicky. "I daresay she said that to Dad too. It'ud be just like her!"

Mingled with Lady Pendre's amazement, there was a sense of despair. She had so hoped that everything might be calm and harmonious for her son's return. Yet never had the household presented a more disunited front. Her husband—Vicky—Pamela—and then this sudden banishment of the old family friend and governess, Miss Brigstocke. Of course, she had not always been quite wise or prudent, but she had truly loved Vicky, and the girl would miss her terribly. Lady Pendre was conscious of feeling a warm attachment for the woman who had thus befriended her daughter, although she had had very little to do with her herself. She had been there so long that she had become like some familiar piece of furniture whose removal would cause a gap.

"Oh, can't you plead for her?" cried Vicky, suddenly impatient of her mother's detached attitude toward Pendre and its inmates. It seemed to the girl that she watched the drama always from a remote place in the gallery, watched it attentively and critically, but never wished or tried to come down to the stage and play her part.

"I'm afraid not," said Lady Pendre. "Your father must do as he thinks best."

Was it indolence, or indifference, or perhaps a mixture of both, that made her thus stand aside? Vicky could not tell, she only felt as if she herself were beating her hands impotently against a thick wall of ice. Iron and ice—those were the things her parents respectively offered her. All at once she felt helpless and very weak and childish. She wished that Martin had lifted her up in his arms and taken her away with him. She had only come back to her father's fury, her mother's cold indifference. On these two altars she and Miss Brigstocke were to be sacrificed, unwilling, reluctant but helpless victims.

"If you could have said one word—!" she exclaimed.

But Lady Pendre only looked down at her and answered: "You know I never interfere." It was so final, so conclusive, that the old chilly feeling came over Vicky, turning her heart to stone.

"Why does he hate me so?" she asked.

"Don't talk like that, Vicky dear. He doesn't . . ."

She could see that the girl was thoroughly overwrought, and in an excited, exalted condition to which no doubt Martin's visit had largely contributed. She seemed too much of a child and far too inexperienced to have to cope with such weighty problems as love and marriage. If the whole affair had been suffered to pass in silence, Lady Pendre believed that Vicky would have been the first to forget it. Even by her own showing, Martin's attitude was far more serious than her own. It might be that it had awed her. She had gone forth lightly upon the adventure, and it had held things for which she had not been prepared. Martin's love, ardent, purposeful, had perhaps awakened her.

Something of compassion came into her face, and Vicky, who was supersensitive, immediately perceived it. It emboldened her to say:

"And you—would you be against my marrying Martin?"

"Not if you cared for him. But you're a little too young to judge of that yet."

Vicky lifted her eyes to her mother's face.

"I think he taught me to-day," she said simply.

"Yes?"

"He seemed so afraid of things coming between us—preventing our being married. Poor Martin—it must have been a nasty jar for him to meet Dad at the station!"

Lady Pendre did not speak. Blame attached to Martin—there was no doubt of that. He was perfectly aware how matters stood at Pendre, he knew what a child Vicky was, and how completely she was under the authority of her father, and how harsh he could be if she disobeyed him. He had seen all these things a thousand times for himself, and he had had no right to expose the girl to Lord Pendre's fierce anger. It was absurd to blame Vicky—she had been a mere tool in his hands—perhaps she scarcely realized how significant her action would seem if it ever reached her father's ears. For, unlike other girls, she had never been accorded the slightest modicum of liberty—all her actions were supervised and watched as if she were still a child. Nevertheless, she had always been like a wild thing imprisoned in a cage, struggling, moaning, beating against the bars. . . .

Vicky put up her arms and kissed her mother, clasping her.

"If it weren't for Briggy, I shouldn't really mind," she said. "I know Martin'll come back one of these days. And soon I shall have Eustie—he's sure to take my part." There was comfort in the thought. "I wish you were on my side, but I suppose you simply have to stick up for Dad whether you want to or not."

She kissed her mother again, and ran lightly up the stairs that led to the schoolroom.

CHAPTER II

The Return of Eustace Wingrave

1

A MIST of green and pale gold hung gossamer-like over the deep purple-brown of the Pendre woods. Last year's fallen leaves still lay like a close carpet upon the moist brown earth, but they were pierced here and there by the strong tough stems and knots of young bracken, and by the slim and delicate spears of wild hyacinth and daffodil. In sheltered nooks it was possible to find a few early primroses, so pale as to be almost colorless, while the snowdrops bloomed in thick patches, defying the real snow that sometimes fell and smothered them.

The blue line of the Irish sea showed between the slopes of two wooded hills that curved sharply down to the narrow valley that divided them like a thin ridge. A stream, swollen by recent rains, hurtled down the valley like a shining tortuous serpent. The musical sound of its ripple was like a soprano song, sung to the deep, distant accompaniment of the sea.

The house at Pendre stood upon the terraced slope of the eastern hill, and was protected on two sides by a thick belt of trees. Its mullioned windows looked out across an enchanting space of wood and pasture-land to the blue misty line beyond. Great terraced gardens surrounded the splendid old stone pile.

It was very still. The tempestuous days of winter were over, and a mild February was about to give place to March. There was a touch of spring in the air, sharp and vigorous, but none the less significant, a breathless, ice-like quality.

It was just the kind of day, Lady Pendre felt, that she would have chosen for Eustace' return.

She stood at the library window, waiting for the sound of machinery and wheels that would herald his approach. A sense of expectancy throbbed in every nerve. And, paradoxically, she dreaded the very moment to which she was looking forward so passionately.

She was a very reserved woman, in whom a profound, natural reticence had deepened with years, and from the effect of the life she had been called upon while still very young to lead. She shrank from even a faintly adumbrated emotion. Vickey's picture of her mother watching the happenings of Pendre from a remote and obscure spot in the gallery had been a fairly accurate one.

Peace had been restored—an armed false peace across which the recent combatants watched each other with ever-increasing suspicion. Lord Pendre knew that his daughter's submission was forced and feigned; she was at heart a rebel, loving Martin, thinking of Martin. . . . Vicky's attitude was calm because of the heavy weight that had passed over her, crushing, as it had seemed fantastically to herself, the very bones in her body. Miss Brigstocke had left that morning, and Vicky as an act of grace had been permitted to motor over to St. David's Bay with her and see her off at the station. By doing so she would inevitably miss the moment of her brother's arrival, and the choice had been by no means easy.

Eustace would therefore find his home outwardly harmonious and united. The swords were sheathed in his honor.

But as Lady Pendre stood there, her thoughts were less with Eustace than of her elder son, some three years his senior, who lay dead in the trenches of Flanders. The boy of her heart, though characteristically she had hardly permitted him to be aware of it. But then she had never been at all intimate with any of her four children. No one, least of all her husband, had known how that death-wound had pierced her heart.

She dreaded the coming of Eustace because she had always understood him less than any of her children. But his attentive, observant, rather mystical eyes, might discern just what she was so determined to hide—the pain that his arrival must give her because of the memories that it would inevitably evoke.

Did Eustace—did anyone—guess that she had loved Philip best? He had been so beautiful, with his bright dark laughing face, full of youth and joy and life. Always, too, there had been a strange sympathy between them. And the night before he was killed, a few weeks before the Armistice, when the great push was impending, he had written to tell her that he loved her above everyone in the world. She had known it, of course, even when he had become engaged to Pamela Webb. There had never been any change in his love for her, only he had not spoken of it. Just the consciousness of imminent peril, the possibility—nay, the probability—of death had constrained him to write that letter. She had had to share it with her husband, but it had been an effort to her to show it to him. She just put it into his hand and went out of the room without saying a word. Later she found it in an envelope, addressed to her and placed on her dressing-table near Philip's photograph. Lord Pendre had never alluded to it, but once or twice afterward she had noticed that his eyes were fixed upon her in a queer questioning way, half wistful, half-suspicious. What had been the measure of that intimacy between mother and son? From what deep and unseen roots had it sprung? Even she could hardly have answered those questions.

Lord Pendre had not learned a great deal of the difficult art of silence and self-control, yet sometimes he exhibited those qualities to his wife as if she had unconsciously imposed her example upon him.

Increased wealth and a peerage had come to him during the war which had yet robbed him so severely. For to him Philip had been less a son than the figure upon whom all his ambitious hopes were centered, his elder son, his heir, destined to inherit Pendre, the new title, the old lands purchased a dozen years ago with his new-gotten wealth. To this handsome brilliant boy he had shown all the indulgence of which his hard and dominating nature was capable. Philip had early been a companion to him, eager, intelligent, a boy to whom no day was ever too long nor filled too full. In accepting the peerage Lord Pendre's first thought had been for him. And then, only a year or two later, he had fallen. Lord Pendre, when the fatal telegram came, had the feeling that the world, his own comfortable, familiar, material world, had crumbled into ruins. Philip was dead, his joy and hope. There was Eustace, of course . . . a queer ill-conditioned boy. Like his mother, but without her beauty. Thinking his own thoughts, immersed in his own secret projects. Eustace. . . .

Lady Pendre was aware that her husband's welcome of this survivor would be forced and constrained.

Slowly the thoughts of Philip faded, and as she stood there, gazing across the woods to the far faint blueness of the Irish Sea, she found herself trying to visualize Eustace as she had seen him last, nearly three years ago. Very young-looking, smallish, with a thin, slight undeveloped figure, a white face with overhanging brows and strange burning eyes set so deep that they looked almost like lamps glimmering in the dim recesses of a cavern. Sometimes, indeed, they had seemed to her, accusing, reproachful eyes, as if she had robbed him of something that he had a right to possess. Of course, that was only the result of a morbid imagination. Eustace knew nothing. None of her children knew anything. The few acquaintances of her girlhood, that had been spent for the most part abroad with a reckless impecunious father, were all either dead or dispersed. There was no fear of ghosts ever arising to confront her, yet even now when she visualized Eustace, she seemed to be aware of those accusing condemnatory eyes, as if subconsciously he could perceive the very thing she had assiduously hidden from him.

Suddenly her vagrant uneasy thoughts flew back to a scene of his nursery days. She was standing in the big London nursery—they had had a house in Knightsbridge then, long since given up. She had gone in to see the children one evening just before dining out. Philip, in blue pajamas, was sitting at a low table near the fire, eating his supper of bread and milk. He was flushed and rosy from his bath, his dark curls were still shining with moisture. Near him was Barbara, fair, dainty, well-behaved, always even in those days gaily submissive to authority as if anything else would be "bad form." Vicky, then a baby in arms, was already in her cot in the next room. Eustace, a small plain child of nearly four, thin and obstinate, was lying on the floor, passionately refusing to move.

"You must say your prayers, like a good boy," the nurse's patient but reproachful voice reiterated.

"No—no! I'll say them to Mummie! Not to you! Charlie Morgan always says his prayers to his Mummie!"

Lady Pendre—she was Mrs. Hugo Wingrave then—stood motionless near the door, watching the little scene with a curious stricken expression upon her face. The nurse was, however, too much occupied with the recalcitrant child to notice it. And the wailing voice from the floor continued to lisp in baby accents: "Charlie Morgan always says his prayers to his Mummie!"

Lady Pendre went forward and, stooping over her little son, lifted him with firm hand from the floor. She could remember even now how light and unresisting he was, yielding to her touch easily and readily . . .

"I haven't time to hear you say your prayers, Eustace," she could hear herself saying coldly, across the years. "You must do as nurse tells you, or I'm afraid she'll have to punish you."

Something in her voice must have cowed or chilled the child into sudden submission. He stood there, limp, tear-stained, with feet squarely set, looking up into her face. She had never forgotten the expression of his eyes, their accusing reproachful look. Just as if she, his mother, had unexpectedly failed him at a crucial, critical moment when he had counted most confidently upon her loving support. . . .

Did he remember the episode? He had a very retentive memory. Always it seemed to her that his coldness toward her had dated from that day. One had to be so careful with little children, their confidence—so difficult to gain—was so easily shaken; something of it all might have remained buried in his subconsciousness, warning him perhaps not to approach her with any request for spiritual help. For many days afterward he had avoided her, only coming if she called, and then unwillingly, with sullen countenance.

She was thankful even then that it hadn't been Philip. She would have wanted to say something in excuse or at least in explanation if it had been Philip to whom she had administered that cruel little rebuff. She *must* have taken him in her arms and kissed him and told him that it wasn't entirely her fault . . . she couldn't help herself—it was part of her punishment . . . she hadn't wanted to be cruel. . . .

It was strange that this little scene, enacted at least eighteen years ago, should haunt her so persistently now and that memory should hand her this unwelcome picture of Eustace, sullen, obstinate, needing her so desperately. She tried to put it from her. She wanted to think of him only as she had last seen him in the khaki uniform that had hung a little loosely on his slender figure. What would he be like after those years spent in Salonica, Palestine, Iraq? What would his career be now? Would he pass automatically to the place once intended for his brother in those great engineering works in the North of England, founded by his father? She could not tell. Not till she had seen him. He would be changed of course. The knowledge that he was the heir might sober his old visions of the future.

2

As she stood there the door was softly opened and a young girl came into the room. She was tall and slender, with pale golden hair, deep blue eyes, a clear-cut but slightly insensitive face.

"The train must have been late, Pamela," said Lady Pendre.

Pamela Webb slipped her hand into the elder woman's arm.

"Oh, doesn't it hurt you to think it might have been Philip?" she whispered.

Lady Pendre's face stiffened a little. Dearly as she loved this girl whom Philip had intended to marry, she had never allowed her to penetrate to those recesses of her soul wherein she kept her adoration, her remorse and grief. She drew away, as if with an instinctive shrinking, from the contact, and said:

"It would break my heart if such an idea as that occurred to Eustace!"

Pamela Webb, so near, so dear to her because of her love for Philip and his for her, must yet never approach the inner shrine where his mother kept that beloved memory enthroned. Like all very reserved people, Lady Pendre had no intimate friends. She loved Pamela more for Philip's sake than for her own. It had been, she sometimes felt, almost inevitable that they should have fallen in love with each other. In their young perfection, both endowed with health and strength and with an almost fantastic measure of physical beauty, they had seemed ideally suited. But since her son's death Lady Pendre had reluctantly perceived disparities and propensities in the girl's character that had sometimes made her pause and ask herself whether the marriage, had it taken place, would have turned out as happily as they had once imagined.

Her attitude toward Vicky, for instance. That significant remark about Miss Brigstocke. A scarcely veiled antagonism, a thinly disguised jealously, where Vicky was concerned, a disposition to thrust her on one side, and lower her a little in her father's estimation.

Pamela had never tried to win Vicky's affection, contenting herself with an ardent friendship for Barbara. But Barbara was already married when the news of Philip's death had reached Pendre, and her brother, dear as he was, had been in some sense superseded by her husband, Gerard Hammond, and the tiny son who bore his gallant young uncle's name.

The Wingrave children had always paired off, as happens in so many families. Philip and Barbara, Eustace and Vicky—deep-proven alliances, intimate, loyal, and if necessary powerfully offensive as well as defensive. And the warm fast friendship between Eustace and Vicky still survived. They were oddly alike in many ways. They had always formed a turbulent element not easy to govern.

Since Philip's death Pamela had made her home almost entirely at Pendre, although nearly two years and a half had elapsed since that event. She was glad to escape from an uncongenial roof, from a youngish sharp-tongued stepmother immensely preoccupied with her own big brood of unattractive children. As the only child of her father's first marriage she had inherited her mother's little fortune. Enough for clothes—of which she always had a great many—and such things as journeys and sundry expenses. She liked the life at Pendre, dignified, ordered, luxurious. Lady Pendre was not unwilling to keep her there, but she foresaw difficulties, now that Vicky would soon be coming out. Pamela could no longer play first fiddle, as she had done while Vicky was in the schoolroom. Lord Pendre's affection for her was even greater than that of his wife; she formed, too, a link with Philip; to befriend her was something they could still do for him. The engagement had met with his whole-hearted approval, and even now he was unaware of those undercurrents that had begun to perplex and disturb his wife. If his attention had been drawn to them, he would unhesitatingly have fastened the whole blame upon Vicky.

"Vicky's not back yet, I suppose?" said Lady Pendre.

"Oh no—she insisted upon going with Miss Brigstocke to the station. Fa was awfully against it," said Pamela.

She always called Lord Pendre "Fa"—the word was short for father, and she had invented it when she first became engaged to Philip. It always produced an evilly irritating effect upon Vicky.

"Vicky will miss her," said Lady Pendre.

"Oh well, it was rather a bore for you all having her. Fa must have felt it was a case of now or never when he sent her away."

She had hardly finished speaking, when the expected sound of an approaching motor car made itself heard.

3

Lady Pendre gave a little start. Pamela stood stone-still. Her face had an ashen, frozen look. Eustace! She had only seen him once and had not been exactly prepossessed in his favor. He had had nothing of Philip's beauty and joyous happy aspect, and he had possessed something of Vicky's inscrutable, sullen expression.

She was aware now, that Lady Pendre had left her side and had gone into the hall to greet her son. Now she could hear footsteps, a murmur of greetings, the stir of arrival; Lord Pendre's voice giving directions to the chauffeur, striking a familiar commonplace note that seemed to relieve the tension.

Then they all came into the library, where Pamela was standing by the window, tall and slim in her unrelieved black. Eustace advanced toward her, his hand outstretched.

"Hullo, Pamela! Glad to see you here," he said, in his quiet rather melancholy voice.

He had known her prior to her engagement and had sometimes wondered a little at Philip's swift overthrowal. He had discerned in her the elements of a ruthless, resolute ambition. But just now, looking at her pale sculptured face, the delicious gold of her hair cut straight across her forehead, the slightly weary expression of her beautiful eyes, he could feel nothing but compassion for her.

Even now he was not very tall, had still that thin undeveloped look that made him appear younger and more boyish than his twenty-two years seemed to warrant, especially considering all the experience of life that had been crammed into them during this long period of wandering and warfare. The dark limp hair still hung slightly loose above the vast disproportionate forehead. The deep, deep eyes still gazed with unconscious questioning from beneath the black penthouse brows, luminous, burning. It was a pale eager face, not at all unattractive; the eyes redeemed it from plainness.

The younger son who had come back to fill Philip's place. The heir to Pendre . . . Pamela turned away and fixed her eyes upon the garden, over which the blue dusky veils of the spring evening were beginning to fall.

"Come and have some tea, Eustie, you must be cold," said Lady Pendre.

She was standing near him, and as she spoke she laid her hand on his shoulder. He flushed a little at the contact; his eyes lit up with a swift gleam of pleasure. Of course, it was hopelessly rotten for them all. He oughtn't to have been there now, safe and sound, without a scratch or a day's illness, while Philip was lying dead in Flanders. Rough luck on Pamela too. His arrival must turn the knife in her wound.

Tea was served in the green drawing-room, whose paneled walls were hung with delicate old green damask of Italian origin. They often used it in winter in preference to any of the larger rooms, and now, with its cheerful fire, its soft carpets and polished furniture, its subdued electric light hidden close to the ceiling, its plenitude of hot-house flowers, it offered to Eustace' eyes a picture of almost superfluous comfort. Some men were glad to get back to that kind of thing after the frugal hungry years. But he himself felt that the contrast was too striking, too emphatic.

They were all having tea, when there was a sudden sound of flying footsteps coming down the wide corridor. Vicky flung open the door and, dashing into the room, almost hurled herself upon Eustace. It was just as if a young and boisterous spring-wind had entered that calm apartment, bringing with it, too, a hint of wild growing perfumed things, wholesome and vigorous.

"Oh, Eustie, Eustie, darling!" She was laughing and sobbing alternately, apparently completely oblivious of the fact that there were other people present, two of whom were certainly regarding her with a measure of contemptuous intolerance. Why couldn't she be tranquil, as the occasion seemed to demand? Why this gush and excitement? "I did so try to get back in time, but I had to go to St. David's Bay with poor old Briggy. And coming home—the road's awfully bad, you know—we were held up for ages by a puncture."

"Couldn't Briggy have chosen another day for her expedition?" said Eustace, looking at her with a kind of whimsical affection just as if she were a very little girl indeed.

"Oh no—it wasn't her doing—she's had the sack, you know. And the poor old darling was so frightfully miserable that I simply couldn't let her start off alone. But it was bad luck, her having to go to-day."

She was sitting now on the arm of Eustace' chair, twining one thin bare arm round his neck.

Every now and then she would lean her face a little closer to his, and kiss his brow. It was so wonderful to have him there, alive and well. Oh, she had been so frightened, so many times! . . .

Eustace' eyes softened. There was something genuine and authentic about Vicky's welcome that thawed the frozen places of his heart.

"Don't throttle me, darling," he whispered, looking into her face, that in truth somewhat resembled his own. But she was a decided improvement upon her brother. Her hair, thick and dark as his, was clipped like a page's, and framed her tiny narrow pale face with its delicate slightly pointed features. The brow was small and square, with only a tendency to overhang; the chin was pointed, the eyes were dark brown and full of fire and intelligence. Her face was so small that when she was in the room all other women looked slightly out of scale.

The mention of Miss Brigstocke's departure had introduced a jarring note that exasperated Lord Pendre. Why on earth need Vicky drag it in at all, just at the moment when they wished to present a united and harmonious front to the returned warrior, thus giving him a wholly unnecessary glimpse into those events which had so recently been dividing the house against itself? But it was just like Vicky—she had no tact—she was always thrusting herself and her own miserable little affairs into the foreground; she wasn't even trying to make Eustace' homecoming a serene one.

"But why's Briggy gone? I've got something for her," Eustace said, blissfully unconscious that his remark approached dangerous ground.

"She's been sent away," replied Vicky, flushing, and darting an angry glance toward her father, who was sitting between his wife and Pamela: "She wasn't enough of a spy," she whispered.

"Vicky—I won't have you whispering. If you've got anything to tell Eustace, you can say it out loud," said Lord Pendre, in a tone that was at once bland and threatening. "There is no mystery about Miss Brigstocke's leaving us. You were disobedient and getting into mischief, and she hadn't troubled to discover what you were up to. Now Eustace knows all about it."

During the uncomfortable pause that followed, Pamela rose and stole softly out of the room. The little scene affected her to the point of tears. There was, too, a faint family likeness between Eustace and Philip that had never struck her so forcibly as now. And it had hurt her to see this younger son returning home as the heir in Philip's place. The survivor . . . Yes, he would have it all, the beautiful property—she was learning to love every stick and stone at Pendre—the wealth, the lovely ordered leisurely life, free from all financial anxieties. And one day—perhaps even soon—she would have the anguish, too, of seeing another woman enjoying what should have been hers.

"I oughtn't to have stayed—I ought to have gone home—" she thought, as she went hurriedly upstairs, her eyes blinded with scalding tears. It was Vicky's loving, impulsive, exaggerated welcome of her brother that had demolished her own scanty store of self-control.

Vicky had loved Philip, of course—they had all in their respective fashions adored him—but Eustace was her own special brother, whose return was now giving her the most perfect joy she had ever known. It was an even greater joy than she had felt when she had gone out to meet Martin. Conscience had never been perfectly quiet about that illicit adventure, whereas she could enjoy this happiness with everyone looking on.

Pamela had never cared much for Vicky, regarding her in the old days as a troublesome, undisciplined child who richly deserved everything she got from Fa. But of late she had begun to dislike her actively and definitely. She was afraid, too, of her keen vision, her sharp ready tongue. And soon she felt that this child would dispossess her, demand her own rightful place in the house, and perhaps even make it impossible for her to continue to live at Pendre. And it would simply break her heart to leave that lovely spot between the Welsh mountains and the Irish Sea . . .

She had wished to make a good impression upon Eustace, too, but Vicky had thrust herself forward from the moment she came in, absorbing all his attention as if no one else had any right to speak to him at all. So selfish and possessive—she was glad that Fa had given her that well-deserved snub. Pamela had learnt all about that episode with Martin, and it had made her a little jealous of Vicky. Vicky would claim all the attention now as the only daughter of the house. She was lovely in her way, and she would have money if she married to please her father. Vicky had . . . everything. Pamela had never felt herself so bereft as she did this afternoon.

Intuitively, too, she was aware that Lord Pendre hoped perhaps that Eustace might . . . He would have liked to keep Pamela in the family. Of Lady Pendre's attitude she was much less certain, but she felt pretty sure that no difficulties would be forthcoming from that quarter. The only possible opposition would emanate from Vicky, and it would certainly possess a fierce, elemental, fiery quality whose ultimate effect one could hardly foretell.

When she thought of Vicky, sitting there on the arm of Eustace' chair, petting and fondling him in that ridiculous fashion, she could picture how strenuously the girl would oppose any suggestion of the kind.

4

"Poor old Pamela," said Eustace, watching her attentively until she had gone out of the room, closing the door behind her.

"She has been so brave through it all—a perfect heroine," said his father, stiffly. "She's a very fine woman."

Vicky was silent. Her hand clasped her brother's a trifle more firmly, as if with an unconscious desire to obtain his support.

"Does she live here altogether now?" he asked.

"She stays here whenever she likes, and for as long as she likes," corrected Lord Pendre. He spoke in a lofty ruffled tone.

"It comes to exactly the same thing," said Vicky, with unusual temerity.

It amounted, as she knew, to an act of *lèse-majesté* to criticize Pamela, and ordinarily she was far too much afraid of her father to attempt it, but Eustace' presence gave her courage.

There was a brief silence. Lady Pendre sipped her tea. If only Vicky would learn to be silent. . . . Eustace' "Hush darling" did not reach across the room to where his parents were sitting. He began to realize that Vicky and Pamela didn't pull well together, and in his desire for peace he deprecated the fact.

"It does not. You are purposely giving Eustace a false impression," said Lord Pendre. There was a slightly augmented note of exasperation in his voice.

He looked very big and black and formidable as he sat there, Eustace thought. That quality of overwhelming strength and pitiless power struck him afresh every time he saw him. But now after three years' absence it seemed to have increased rather than diminished. Success had only given him an added consciousness of his own ascendency. He had the hardness of a rough-hewn statue rather than that of a man. How useless to hurl one's puny force against that rock, as Vicky was so fond of doing! What could she expect to receive but wounds and bruises and hurts of all kinds? . . .

Pamela's presence in the house had long been an accepted fact, and it was Lord Pendre's pleasure that she should remain there. It would take more than one of Vicky's futile, pigmy earthquakes to remove her! Since Philip's death, she had only been away three times from Pendre, and her longest absence had barely lasted a fortnight. She had her own room, with a charming little sitting-room adjoining. Not such a handsome apartment as Miss Brigstocke's, but she had already suggested that perhaps if they didn't *really* mind she might move into those now unoccupied quarters. No one except Vicky had ever ventured to criticize the arrangement or to resent the apparent permanence of Pamela's stay. And since the days of mourning had come to an end, Lady Pendre had taken Pamela about with her both in Wales and in London, almost as if she had indeed been her own daughter. There had been every excuse for this, since Vicky even now was barely eighteen and had not yet been presented.

Vicky had always been wild and headstrong and insubordinate, unlike the others. She made a discordant element in the house, and her inability to hit it off with her father was becoming daily more pronounced as her childish fear of him diminished. But there were still scenes when she would face him like a rebellious boy. She was intensely lovable and utterly unmanageable. Eustace was the only one who had ever been able to control her. His influence over her in the past had been almost complete. Pamela wondered if it would still be so, whether he would encourage this silly affair with Martin. In her heart she hoped that he would; her one dream was of a Pendre where there would be no Vicky, no younger, prettier, wealthier and more intelligent rival.

Pamela remembered that Eustace and Vicky had always clung together, as if subconsciously realizing that they were somewhat less dear to their parents than Philip and Barbara.

But all that might be changed now, since Eustace had inherited his brother's position. He was the only surviving son, the heir. Already there could be discerned a change, very subtle but significant, in Lord Pendre's manner toward his son. Just as if he wished to remind him . . .

Vicky was still sitting on the arm of Eustace' chair, and now that he had finished his tea—she had been far too much excited to touch her own—she was clasping and caressing his face, stroking his hair, kissing him on cheek and brow with delicate little pecks as if to assure herself that he was really there.

Suddenly Lord Pendre said:—

"Don't go on in that absurd way, Vicky. Anyone would think you were six years old. Sit there—" he pointed to a chair—"and leave Eustace alone!"

She slid down from her perch.

"Sorry, Dad. But I just wanted Eustie to know that someone was glad to see him," she said. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining; there was an edge of deliberate malice in her voice.

"Eustace knows we are all delighted to see him. Delighted—and relieved," said Lord Pendre.

"Pamela had rather a chilly way of showing her rapture," said Vicky.

"Dry up," warned Eustace. "You can't expect her not to feel it."

"She shouldn't have stayed here, then, if she thought it would be too much for her feelings," said Vicky, daringly; "and she *oughtn't* to have stayed," she added.

"If you can't be a trifle less venomous I will send you out of the room," said Lord Pendre. He bestowed upon her a slightly menacing glance that had the effect of immediately silencing her. But she had gone as far as she dared; the satisfaction of saying what she had been burning to say, was hers.

Lady Pendre was silent all through the little scene. She always hated the bickering that went on continually between Vicky and her father, and it seemed an outrage that such an occasion as the present should offer an excuse for it. Once or twice she glanced appealingly at her daughter, as if entreating her to desist. And then she allowed her gaze to rest for one long moment upon Eustace' face. . . .

Of course he looked tired and worn; he had the strained and tense aspect of a man who for many months had endured the horrors of war, living and working in the midst of death and suffering and peril. His face was thin, grave, and a trifle melancholy. Even without Vicky's reckless words he must have discerned how immeasurably their joy was tempered by the sorrowful memories his return could not fail to evoke.

Lady Pendre knew he was far too sweet-tempered to mind that. He had never grudged that limitless love they had all given to Philip. He had loved and admired his brother generously, unstintingly, always feeling perfectly contented that he should occupy the chief seat. For Eustace, too, had been a little under the spell of the elder boy's magic personality that had so endeared him to all, young and old, great and small. It was something that had made Philip's friends feel there was no one quite like him, and that at his death a burning light had been extinguished.

Only Vicky was jealous for Eustace and didn't trouble to hide it. She had given them all a glimpse just now of what was passing in her stormy, restless little mind. Oh, couldn't they all see that though "Phip" had been wonderful, Eustace was wonderful, too? Yes, and beautiful, with his strange flaming eyes that looked like the windows of an imprisoned fiery soul. She stretched out her hand and touched his surreptitiously, afraid lest her father might perceive the gesture. The warm grasp of Eustace' hard thin fingers closing over her own reassured her.

CHAPTER III

The Only Surviving Son

1

EUSTACE escaped to his own room at last. Already a footman was there, unpacking his few possessions and arranging them in the capacious chests and wardrobes.

His room was a big one on the top floor; its three windows swept the horizon, embracing a wide and beautiful view of woodland, sky and sea, with a silver glimpse of the river twisting along the deep bed of the valley. It was almost too dark for him to see anything of it now, but from force of habit he went to the window, flung it open, and sat there staring out into the overflowing cup of dim blue dusk. There was no wind, but the air tasted brackish—how he loved that delicious salt tang!—the sky was clear and growing dark, pierced already by a few faint stars. Nearby the great cedars on the lawn below lifted their flat stiff black branches. He heard the hooting of an owl, an eerie, desolate sound cutting sharply across the silence.

"You can leave all that now, William," he said, turning suddenly to the man. "Finish later."

William withdrew respectfully. Eustace felt an urgent desire for solitude, and the little fidgeting sounds incidental to unpacking had disturbed him. He was thinking: "How on earth am I going to bear family life again?" It seemed to him that he simply could not endure it, the perpetual need for adjustment, the want of true liberty, his father's eternal fault-finding. He had been away three years, and he had acquired a taste for freedom and solitude.

Now that he was alone a certain restlessness came over him.

He longed to be out of doors—out there in the cold, black, yet calm spring night. The air flowed against his face, bracing rather than soothing him. It was more fresh than cold. His long campaigning had given him a distaste for enclosed rooms. That big fire blazing on the hearth rendered the room unpleasantly warm. Then he realized that his eyes were smarting, as if the acrid smoke from the fire had affected them. There was an almost pathetic weariness in the boy's attitude as he leaned his chin on his hand and gazed out upon a scene that was every moment becoming more invisible to him, swallowed up as it were in the darkening shadows.

Pendre . . . It seemed to be holding out hands to him tonight, to clasp him more closely than it had ever done before. It seemed almost to be appealing to him not to turn away from all that it meant to him now. Asking for his care, reminding him of responsibility—the responsibility of man to the brown earth that nourishes him. Had he not fought for England, for the safety of her green fields, the inviolacy of her blue ring of sea? And these fields, these woods, stretching down to the very shore, would one day be his. Could he set aside their claim carelessly, indifferently? Could he neglect the task Philip had not lived to fulfil? Was this a suretyship he could refuse to assume? . . .

The little incidents of his home-coming had reacted unpleasantly upon him, jarring his nerves. His father's temper . . . Pamela's ill-concealed emotion . . . Vicky's biting little speeches. Pamela—he had never imagined somehow that she would be there. He wondered a little how she had contrived to arouse Vicky's definite antagonism. What had she done? Yet Vicky's display of ill-feeling had annoyed him too. It was all so petty . . . she had succeeded in ruffling everyone. Obviously she was upset at Miss Brigstocke's departure. And what on earth had poor old Briggy done to get the sack like this? . . .

The truth was they had all been thinking of Phip, and Eustace began to feel his brother's presence as never before. He would indeed have been scarcely surprised to see him walk into the room at that moment, pipe in mouth, and hear him utter his usual greeting after a prolonged separation.

"Hello, Useless!"

And Eustace would have looked up, his eyes full of satisfaction and admiration, and answer:

"Hello, Phip!"

They had always been glad to see each other. Eustace gave a little shiver. If they could only have known it, he had mourned his brother's absence more deeply and bitterly that afternoon than any of them. He had loved him very much. And in a sense it was he who would suffer most by his death. The change in his own position and circumstances appalled him.

"I could never take his place," he declared now. "I should simply hate it. Family life in a conventional English country house! I could never stick it here. Yet, I suppose it would be cowardly to refuse."

The soft comfort, the warmth, the luxurious ease of the room, with all its handsome furnishings and appurtenances, nauseated him. . . .

The wide sky and the invisible but audible sea were surely calling to him. He felt a desperate longing to go out into the wet woods—the dear beautiful Pendre woods—and sleep on a bed of crisp leaves, with all the tiny, wild, furred and feathered creatures scampering about him.

"I wonder what they'll want me to do? But it's too late to try to make an elder son of me!"

He was twenty-two, and to him as to all young men of his generation independence and harsh experience had come very early. At nineteen he had been in the trenches. And though it was now more than two years since the Armistice, he had remained with his regiment in the East, deferring for many reasons the date of his demobilization. He would have deferred it still longer had it been possible, but his father had written rather peremptorily to him, inviting him to return home.

The experiences of the war had given him a taste for austerity, a dislike of superfluities, and a desire for simplicity in all things. He had been in places where money was of no avail, and thus had acquired a certain contempt for it. Always when a boy he had planned to live a free colonial life, possibly with Vicky, but now how could he hope to realize that ambition? . . .

Philip's death a few weeks before the Armistice . . . They had all believed and hoped that he bore a charmed life. It was the first time that Eustace had returned to Pendre since that tragic event, and the manner of his welcome had shown him how little they had all recovered from the blow. Pamela's rather tragic presence must surely be a continual reminder. . . .

Secretly he sympathized with Vicky and wished that Pamela had not been present at the time of his own arrival. But his mother had at least been calm. She had clung to him a little, as if in a sense he had become doubly dear to her now. There was joy as well as sadness in her eyes. And she had loved Philip so much!

When Eustace contemplated his mother, he was always intrigued by the atmosphere of mystery that seemed to surround her. She was such an enigma. Sometimes when he was away from her, he had been simply obsessed by the desire to penetrate into the recesses of that mind of hers, so that he might understand her. He had found himself continually thinking of her at odd moments, realizing the better, for her absence, the thin sheet of ice which seemed to divide her even from those nearest and dearest to her. Even Philip, to Eustace' knowledge, had chafed against it. Yet Philip had been far too simple of outlook to be intrigued by any subtleties of psychology, although he, too, had felt the presence of some baffling mystery hidden securely behind that barrier of conscious reticence. Mystery . . . and his mother! . . . Eustace made an effort to subdue these fantastic thoughts. For on the face of it what mystery could there possibly be? She had met and married his father when she was eighteen years old—there was a disparity of nearly twenty years between their respective ages, although now it looked even more. Until her marriage, Lady Pendre had lived with her father, Major Kelsey, in various continental cities, chiefly in France and Italy, where living was cheap and existence easy. A vagrant rather penurious life, Eustace had pictured it. And then to marry one of the most conventional of men, to settle down to an ordered wealthy English life, side by side with a man of powerful dominating personality. They had had that house in Knightsbridge at first, where all the children had been born, and a huge mansion on the Surrey hills, which had only been given up when Pendre was bought.

As a young girl Lady Pendre must have been very lovely. Eustace had seen a photograph of her taken at the time of her marriage in the mid-'nineties. He had often pored over it, trying as it were to elicit some clue to the puzzling problem from that exquisite young pictured face. But it offered none. The delicate lips were closely folded, and had their normal withdrawn reticent expression. The eyes, large and dark, gazed seriously and pensively, though to the boy's imagination they seemed to hold a secret defiance. But the beauty was unquestionable, even haunting, and the years had done little to dim its marvelous quality. Neither Vicky nor Barbara would ever be able, in common parlance, to "hold a candle" to their mother.

But this afternoon, on seeing her again after so long an absence, he had been struck afresh by something that was both mysterious and enigmatic in her face. His long thoughts of her had not erred. And, boy-like, he desired to penetrate the mystery—surely a very commonplace and innocent one!—and lay the ghost that was obscurely troubling her. . . .

2

Lady Pendre came into her son's room. She had knocked but Eustace, deep in thought, had not heard her. He rose quickly now, as she approached, and closed the window. She was always sensitive to cold.

Outside the moon had risen, and illuminated with fragile silver the scarf of mist that marked the course of the stream, drifting seaward down the deep cleft of the valley.

He turned to his mother and pulled a chair nearer the fire for her.

"Well, Mummie?" he said smiling.

It was almost a relief to him to see her so calm, so absolutely normal. But there was the least touch of wistfulness in the look she now gave him, just as if she, too, apprehended and deplored the unexplained, invisible barrier that divided her from her children.

The long slim line of her figure was accentuated by the plain straight modern dress she wore, cut short above the ankles and displaying her slender shapely feet. Her hair, turned back from the brow, was coiled closely at the nape of her neck. She wore no jewels of any kind; the lack of them gave to her extreme simplicity of attire a certain austerity.

A pang of pity pierced him. Would it hurt her to know that he was already forming plans for escape? Would he really mean a little more to her, now that she had no other son?

But it wasn't only his mother who seemed to be holding out hands to capture him. . . . There were other things. Pendre itself—the woods, the green fields dipping down to the sea, the very house. They were all demanding something of him. Something that he was unwilling to give. Besides, what could Pendre want of him? His father had only been in possession of that ancient beautiful property for about twelve years. Surely, as a family they had struck no roots in the soil. It wasn't as if he wanted to abandon an ancient heritage that had belonged to his ancestors. There were thousands of men in England as capable of doing their duty by Pendre as he was.

And yet he felt that the place was asking something of him, Eustace Wingrave, a gift that perhaps only his hands could bestow. . . . What was it that it wanted? What on earth had he to give? He stirred restlessly in his seat.

"Mummie dear, you know I've been terribly sorry for you all. And I hate the thought of taking Phip's place. I can never be to you what he was. So splendid . . ."

She bent her head a little so that her face was almost entirely in shadow. But the little gesture seemed to convey to him an assurance that his spontaneous tribute had touched and pleased her.

Presently she looked up and said in quite a quiet matter-of-fact voice:

"You must do your best to take his place, darling. Try to be everything that he would have been. You know he always thought the world of you, Eustie. And things are always easier when one's duty is quite clear."

He gave a sharp sudden movement that was almost like a shiver of dismay. Had she divined the trend of his thoughts—his dreams of the future? Would she, too, join with the old house in weaving nets to prevent his escape? . . .

"I can't ever be what Phip was," he said doggedly, "it isn't in me. And I want quite a different life from this one. The war's taught me that. I want to be free," he added, not daring to look at her. "To learn things."

"Free!" she repeated, as if the word held for her a strange sound.

"It's as if something were calling to me," he burst out vehemently. "I don't say there aren't other forces trying to keep me here, because there are."

In his pale narrow passionate face the dark eyes glowed strangely.

She gazed at him questioningly, patiently. "Yes, Eustie? What kind of things do you want to learn?"

His answer astonished her. "About God, chiefly," he said in a low choked voice, as if he were both reluctant and ashamed to reveal anything so intimate about his secret thoughts.

Momentarily he was startled, almost terrified, at the effect his words produced upon her. What ancient hurt had that arrow struck? She turned her head abruptly away, and he saw that the little pale hands lying in her lap were clasped, nay strained together, so that the bones showed sharply through the white skin. But she was very still. No sound escaped her. And yet he felt that his words had struck her like a blow, bewildering her, robbing her of speech, almost of sense. . . .

Across the silence that followed, Lady Pendre could hear a child's shrill, passionate voice crying: "Charlie Morgan always says his prayers to his mummie!" She wondered inconsequently if Eustace remembered and ever contemplated that far-off scene.

"You see, I've never been taught anything here," he went on, not reproachfully, but as if to justify himself for setting forth upon such a quest.

"But you learned things, didn't you?" she said quietly. "I mean, from nurses and governesses, and at school. You weren't left altogether in ignorance."

"They didn't teach us much," he answered, in his queer withdrawn voice. "Neither Phip nor I were ever confirmed. Dad didn't insist, and you never said a word. So we talked it over—Phip and I—and came to the conclusion we'd better wait. We saw, of course, that you never went to church or to the communion service yourself, and Dad only about twice a year. But it's since Phip's death that I've thought and thought about these things!" He broke off. "Sorry, Mummie, but I've got to find out the truth for myself—somehow—somewhere . . ."

He expected reproaches, but then when had she ever rebuked or reproached him? Her long slow gaze, full of wonder for all its wistfulness, was fixed steadily upon him. It seemed to him to hold both surprise and encouragement. And to his own astonishment he felt nearer to her than he had ever done before. She wasn't alienated by his words, that had held bitterness, too, as well as suggested reproach, and perhaps had revealed his own revolt against her long silence on the subject of religion.

"You're old enough," she said; "you're twenty-two. Only be careful. Ask God to help you, my dear."

He stared at her, hardly able to believe that she had really spoken thus, with an earnestness, a fervor, he had never before associated with her.

"You did so much for us all," he found courage to say, "that I've often wondered why you left us so utterly in the dark—without guidance—in this one thing. It could only be, I used to think, because you were indifferent to religion yourself, and so didn't care if we believed in anything or not!"

Their eyes met—the dark eyes so strangely alike. But he saw by the reticent look in her face that neither now nor at any other time would she offer him excuse or explanation for that apparently deliberate *lacuna* in their education. They must accept it and translate it as they chose, and seek their own spiritual paths without reference to her.

She said in rather a muffled tone: "Did Phip mind very much?"

"Not so very much. Not nearly as much as I did. Of course, I hardly saw him after he went to the front. I'd gone by the time he came back on leave the second time. And he always took things more for granted than I did. He thought it rather queer, of course. We met chaps at school who were badgered at home about religion and going to church till they were pretty well sick of it. Some of them were even thrashed if they tried to shirk. And they used to think it odd that we'd never been pestered about it. And then in the trenches, with death so near day after day, one couldn't help thinking about an after-life—whether there was one and what it was like, and whether one had to be worthy of it in order to get there. I don't mean just because we'd got the wind up—it was a real desire to know, to learn if there was any compensation for the hell we were going through."

"Why didn't you ask your father, Eustie? I mean, when you were a boy at school?"

"Dad!" he said with a touch of scorn. "Oh, yes, I know he goes to church on Sundays for the sake of example—he'd think it ungentlemanly to be anything but a churchman and a conservative. But that isn't the kind of religion I want!"

She winced slightly. "What *do* you want, Eustie, darling? I mean—have you any idea?"

A curious almost mystical expression came over his face, giving it a beauty of expression she had never before seen upon it.

"I want to know more about Our Lord Jesus Christ," he said. "I love Him, you know. I want to find the way to get closer to Him. I used to think He seemed near me so that I never felt frightened nor too much alone. I've so hoped that Phip felt that too."

He fumbled at his collar, and presently drew forth a little crucifix attached to a thin silver chain.

"This was given to me by a chap who was dying—a Catholic," he continued. "He told me it was indulgenced for the hour of death. He made me promise not to take it till he was dead."

Lady Pendre sat there so still that it almost seemed as if she were transfixed to the spot. She stared at the crucifix, and for the moment the emotionless calm of her face was broken up, disturbed, as if some mighty storm had passed over it. She looked . . . frightened. Then she rose suddenly and went toward Eustace, standing over him. He felt her nearness, and did not dare to move.

She bent down, caught the chain in her hand and raising the crucifix to her lips kissed the Nailed Feet almost with passion. And before he could turn or speak she had left him, hurrying out of the room, closing the door sharply behind her, as if in entreaty that he would not try to follow her. . . .

3

Eustace replaced the crucifix, first touching it with his lips as his mother had done.

He was frankly puzzled. "I must have upset her by saying that about Phip," he reflected. "What a brute I am! Perhaps she's sorry now for her—indifference. But she didn't seem to mind anything I said as long as I only talked about myself."

Yet—was she indifferent? Had not that little impulsive action of hers been a significant, a self-revealing one? He felt that he could never again regard her as indifferent or unbelieving. She *did* care, and her silence respecting the things of religion was perhaps deep-rooted in that mystery which permeated her whole personality, so that one always seemed to be looking at her in some dusky mirror that presented one with a blurred if beautiful image of which the lines were never quite clear. She *did* care, and for the first time he felt that he had inadvertently laid his hand upon the key to that hidden mystery which had so baffled three out of her four children.

That such a good woman as his mother should live so utterly apart from religion had puzzled him ever since he had first been able to realize how destitute her life apparently was of all tangible spiritual support and ideals. His father's attitude had seemed a far more normal one. He had taken his children to church on Sundays, sitting in the "squire's" big pew with its red cushions and high hassocks. His two daughters sat one on each side of him, and the boys occupied respectively the far ends of the line; thus they were rigorously divided from each other, and Eustace was always placed next to Barbara, who could be depended upon to check any signs of inattention and restiveness on his part. But he could never remember seeing his mother in church. It was rather a long walk—she hated walking—perhaps that had been her excuse. But even in London, where there were churches quite close? . . . There was surely no excuse then.

It comforted him now to remember, after the abrupt ending to their interview, that she had shown something like approbation and encouragement when he had spoken of his contemplated quest. She realized perhaps how impossible it would be to accomplish it here in this great house, with its servants, its furniture, its suffocating luxury. He must go out into the world, like the pilgrims of old, poor, humble, seeking.

He went back to the window and looked out upon the black sleeping woods, mere shadows now, at one with the night.

In the far distance the moon touched the sea so that between the trees it showed a line of impalpable silver. Something was calling to him, urgently, persuasively. The world that lay beyond Pendre! God's world, for which His Only Son had died, shamefully tortured upon the Cross. And to what end? Somewhere in that world there must be someone to show him the truth, to teach him why, to answer the questions that perplexed and baffled him.

His mother, listening to him, had urged him to pray. . . . When he remembered that, his heart grew soft toward her. He felt that he loved her more tenderly than ever before. He felt, too, her love for him.

Of course from his father he had only to expect reproaches and recriminations. Lord Pendre was a busy energetic man who despised idleness in others. And every form of employment that did not receive an adequate recompense in the shape of hard cash was inevitably stigmatized by him as idleness. He had always perceived in Eustace, to his own bitter disappointment, a lack of energy, of initiative, that he considered augured less than well for his son's future. Perhaps he might force him into accepting the post in the firm which had always been destined for Philip. Lord Pendre would inevitably regard Eustace' spiritual quest, if indeed he ever came to hear of it, as a mere specious pretext for idling. There had never been much sympathy between father and son. There was too great a gulf of time and thought between them. The War had shown too sharply the line that divided the elder from the younger generation. For the brunt of the bitter reaping had, after all, fallen upon the young.

But there was no such division between Eustace and his mother. This evening she had seemed so young—scarcely older than himself—eager in her silent sympathy. They had seemed more closely knit together than ever before. He felt happier, now that he had told her of what was in his mind. And almost, at that last moment before her abrupt leaving of him, he had had the feeling that she was trembling upon the brink of some crucial revelation that would forever elucidate all those baffling ambiguities in her character and show her to him in a new and dazzling perfection, no longer as in a glass darkly, but as it were face to face in pristine, undimmed splendor. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Undercurrents

1

THE first days at home passed peacefully. The truce between Lord Pendre and his daughter continued.

Often Eustace found himself alone with Pamela Webb, although it was certainly not by any wish of his own, nor did it occur to him immediately that it was the result of her deliberate contriving.

Her air of gentle melancholy rather attracted him. In her fair, gold and white way she was certainly very pretty, and far from ordinary-looking. Yet it was difficult for Eustace to understand why she had aroused the not too easy adoration of his brother. Philip had always been fastidious, and Pamela was hardly sufficiently alive, intellectually speaking, to have satisfied him as a permanent companion.

It was not long before he began to see that Vicky was right in resenting Pamela's perpetual presence in the house. As long as she remained at Pendre it was difficult for them to resume a wholly normal life. She kept them all, as it were, close to their grief. Vicky's exasperation was not really exaggerated or unnatural—it was indeed an almost wholesome protest against this nursing of a great grief in a world where there was still so much work to be accomplished. Vicky was young, and her very youth had begun to clamor for its proper, normal joys and pleasures, after the years overshadowed by the War.

And, then, there was Pamela's influence over Lord Pendre to be reckoned with. Vicky had first pointed this out to Eustace, and he became aware of it at every turn. None of his own children—not even Barbara—had ever twisted him, so to speak, round his or her little finger as did Pamela. Vicky rebelled in secret against this exotic influence, and felt that Pamela deliberately widened the breach between herself and her father.

Barbara Hammond's arrival with her small son, a few days later, created a diversion that was something of a relief. Her boy, who was now two and a half years old, was a handsome, sturdy dark child, resembling Philip, whose name he bore. He was indeed almost absurdly like the photographs of his uncle taken at the same age. Lord Pendre was extremely attached to his grandson. A regular Wingrave! Possessing even at that early and immature age signs of the desperate obstinacy, the ceaseless energy, the indomitable will that characterized your true Wingrave. Supposing Eustace shouldn't turn out satisfactorily, it was a comfort to feel that in another twenty years Barbara's son would be available to direct the fortunes of the firm.

The little fellow, with the unerring instinct of childhood, was aware of his grandfather's predilection, and was wholly without that fear of him which had characterized his own children at that early age.

Both Barbara and Pamela were completely absorbed in the little Philip. Their stay at Pendre was necessarily a short one, as Gerard Hammond could not leave town, and disliked being separated from his wife and son. But while it lasted, Eustace noticed that he saw much less of Pamela Webb.

Barbara brought a new element to Pendre. She was gay, smart, and assured, and perfectly contented with her lot as the wife of a rich stockbroker. Her life in London was full of interests, domestic, social, philanthropic. She loved her husband and adored her child. Although she was only a year or two older than Eustace, she always seemed to him a great deal older. Perhaps it was due to that slightly superior manner of hers, suggestive of deeper personal experiences than any he could yet have savored. Vicky called it her "married airs." Barbara was pretty in a fair, brilliant, vivacious way, and her clothes were always appropriate and very perfect. Her outlook was quite frankly materialistic, and she shared her father's respect for wealth and position and all the temporal advantages of success.

Pamela always reacted swiftly to new attractive influences, and soon her very clothes assumed a brighter look, and something of Barbara's hard, assured gaiety seemed to inform her.

2

Barbara sought out Eustace in the smoking-room one morning. She had for some days wished to "have it out" with her brother, and the time of her own departure was drawing near, so she felt bound to make use of her first opportunity. It wasn't altogether easy to get hold of Eustace; he seemed intuitively to discern the fact when anyone wanted to say something to him that wasn't quite to his taste; it made him slippery, elusive. . . .

But although "demobbed" officers all the world over were finding themselves *dépaysés,* there was really no excuse for Eustace to suffer from that particular form of discontent. He had a good post waiting for him, and he knew it. Of course just at first this disposition to idleness was natural; he probably needed rest after his long arduous work, with all its attendant hardships and privations. Only, he must be made to see that this sort of thing couldn't go on forever. For a very young man it was decidedly demoralizing. . . .

"Well, Eustie, you'll have to give up day-dreaming soon," she said, cheerfully. He was sitting by the fire reading, pipe in mouth, looking the picture of idleness. His attitude annoyed Barbara.

Her bright bracing manner displayed a faint touch of irritability.

"Naturally, you'll take Phip's place in the firm," she continued, addressing still the back of his brown head turned resolutely toward her. "Gerard says he quite envies you. So many very able young men are looking for jobs, that it's quite a comfort to think yours is only waiting for you to step into!"

"Is it? But, you see, the trouble is that I've not yet made up my mind what I'm going to do."

He puffed away at his pipe.

She opened her big blue eyes very wide. "What on earth do you mean, Eustie?"

"Just what I say. I'm not sure what I'm going to do. I hate engineering—I pity those poor chaps that work up at Wingrave's, with all my heart. And I wasn't brought up to be an elder son. I find my new honors rather overwhelming!" There was a keen edge of satire in his voice. It exasperated Barbara afresh.

"Oh, Eustie darling—don't be an idiot!" she entreated.

It was not thus that Gerard received her words of advice and counsel. But relations were always tiresome to deal with; they never seemed to see eye to eye with one. They took refuge in unnecessary sarcasms . . .

His face did not relent. It was cold and stern; the lips firmly compressed, suggesting a complete reticence. She thought involuntarily: "What a *hungry* look he has about the eyes! What can he want that he hasn't got?"

"I'll try not to be," he said presently, with a slight ironic smile. Barbara always made him feel nervous; he dreaded her swift acute vision, her readiness to detect the weak spot in one's armor and attack it. . . .

In a sense he admired her. She had got exactly what she wanted; she was ambitious, successful, popular both with men and women. Her marriage was a happy one; she was perhaps a happier woman than her mother had ever been.

"She's got all she wants—she doesn't know there's anything else," he thought, turning his head and looking into her bright, rather hard face. He saw that she was immensely typical of all the "smart" young women of her day, very slenderly made, very clear-cut, perfectly attired, beautifully *coiffée*.

He turned away and sank back into the dreamland from which she had awakened him. He wondered if he was really the only one of the four children to suffer under that dismal lack of all spirituality in their lives. Long before he had faced wounds and death in the trenches, and endured a measure of cold and privation that had sometimes seemed insupportable, he had been aware of that lack. He could remember one night—a warm and beautiful night in Palestine, full of wonderful starlight, when he had had a strange mystical experience that he had never been able to explain. But it was that more than anything that had made him say to his mother: "I love Him, you know. I used to think He seemed near me." Just that—the nearness, the individual love and protection . . . extended even to the sparrows. It had come and gone all too swiftly, like the brushing of wings, a fleeting touch that had yet had an objective existence. He could not speak of it to anyone, even to his mother. And least of all to Barbara—she would quite certainly have thought him mad. . . .

"Well, I daresay Dad'll be willing to give you a few months' holiday first," she observed. "Most men have come back with their nerves a bit dicky."

"My nerves are quite all right, thank you. It's really more than a year since I was last potted at. It jolly nearly got me too," he added, with a smile that was slightly grim.

Barbara sat down near him.

"Do listen, Eustie—it's very important, you know. I've been having a talk to Dad about you, and of course he realizes that you've had no special training, and then you didn't even have one year at Oxford as Phip did. We agreed that you'd probably hate office life at first, and you haven't any taste for engineering." As she spoke, she purposely employed that charm of manner which with her always signified a deadly and dynamic determination of purpose. She looked at her brother closely, rather as if she were measuring his powers of endurance, for he was a little strange to her after their long separation—why, he had been still at school when she married! And if in the interval she had known fresh experiences, he too could not have been wholly without them. There was something almost a little forbidding about him now, as if he were inclined to resent interference and gratuitously-proffered advice, no matter how well-meant.

"I'm sure you'll find him quite willing to give you a holiday before you go north," she continued.

"Did Dad tell you to say that?" he inquired, with lowering brow.

"Well, not exactly. But you've shown him you weren't exactly anxious to discuss your future with him . . . he must have guessed there was a hitch somewhere."

So it had been discussed, and he wondered if his mother had been present. Perhaps she had even interceded for him, in order to obtain the grace of this brief reprieve. They all knew how repugnant this career would be to him, and so they were anxious, as it were, to let him down easily, perhaps indeed suspecting that this was their only chance of gaining his ultimate consent.

"I don't want money! I hate it!" he exclaimed, with sudden vehemence. "And I think you're all mad to put it before everything! Before happiness, religion, peace of mind. . . ."

She was surprised and startled, and it took her a few seconds in which to recover from the onslaught of these fierce unexpected words. The dark deep-set eyes were glowering at her, like those of some sullen animal at bay before its would-be tamers. Then she gave a little short laugh that did not ring quite true.

"Don't lose your temper, Eustie dear—it isn't worth while. We all have to do quantities of things we hate in this world. And we women have the worst of it in the long run."

She was bright and conciliatory as ever, and only very slightly ruffled by his obstinate attitude. Eustace thought that some day she ought to enter the political world; she would certainly excel in persuading incredulous people that measures, disagreeable in themselves, would be for their ultimate good.

"What a pity you weren't a boy, Barbara," he said good-humoredly. "You'd have filled the part of elder son toppingly. You've all the qualities, and the governor depends upon you."

His brief anger had spent itself. And, after all, she was not to blame. She was the child of her upbringing, her environment, her education. The mould had fitted her. Never, as far back as he could remember, had she ever evinced the slightest rebellion against her lot. He could always picture her as dainty, well-behaved, a composed little woman of the world, even in the nursery. No one had ever dreamed of punishing Barbara; there could have been no possible excuse for such an outrage. Her instinctive tact had always shown her exactly how far she could go, and the way of the transgressor had held no attraction for her. Whereas he and Vicky had eternally courted penalties by their frequent insensate mutinies. Lord Pendre, indulgent to his two elder children, had proved a merciless disciplinarian to the younger ones. "My dear," he used to say to his wife, who disliked scenes, "if you won't punish them, I must." And punish them he did, going back to the drastic measures that had obtained in his own boyhood forty years before.

"I hope I should have always tried to do my duty," said Barbara, pointedly.

A model daughter, wife and mother—that was her ambition. She had fulfilled the three parts meticulously, never shirking anything that they might entail, and only demanding in return that her surroundings and externals should be model too, luxurious, expensive, unimpeachable. The *décor* must be perfect, the limelight carefully adjusted. Only then could she be at her best. . . .

But something in her tone irritated Eustace to renewed perverseness.

"Look here, Barbara," he said, eying her coolly, "it isn't any use your trying to coerce me. I'm not going into the firm—I should make a most unholy mess of things if I did. I don't want the money. And I must be free—free to do all kinds of things that don't enter into your life or imagination! You simply haven't time for them, and you wouldn't want them if you had. You and Gerard are probably just as much suffocated with luxury as they are here. You're a pair of materialists like Dad, only it's worse because you're younger. Oh, I'm not blaming either him or you—it's the way you and all your sort are made. But you shan't induce me to sell my soul!"

"Why, you're quite a *Bolshie,* Eustie," she said. "How awfully funny of you!"

"I was expecting that," he answered sullenly.

They were aware then of some slight stir, and, turning abruptly, they saw that Lady Pendre had come quietly into the room and was standing irresolutely on the threshold, her white fingers still nervously clasping the handle of the door. She was very pale.

"What were you saying about selling your soul, Eustie?" she asked with a very faint tremor in her voice.

3

Eustace rose and went a step toward his mother. Somehow he didn't feel so hopeless of gaining her understanding sympathy as he did that of his sister.

"I was just explaining to Barbara why I can't go into the business, but I'm afraid I shall never make her understand. She's been talking to Dad about it. I should hate it and I don't want the money—I'd rather starve."

"Try starving," murmured Barbara, sweetly.

"Thanks, I've lived for several days on emergency rations—it was a pretty good imitation."

Lady Pendre looked a little anxiously from one to the other. She admired her daughter, appreciating her beauty, her assurance, her social gifts. But no one on earth was further from her than Barbara in her present phase. With her brilliant marriage, she seemed to have passed completely out of her possession; she had sometimes a little difficulty in realizing that this was her own child.

But her sympathies were with Eustace. He had played his part very manfully—the soldier's part for which he was so entirely unsuited both physically and mentally. She said coldly:

"Eustace is twenty-two. We can none of us force him into doing anything he doesn't like."

"I was only telling him what Dad wishes," said Barbara, "but that doesn't seem to count. Eustie's got these queer Bolshie ideas into his head, and until he gets rid of them it would be no earthly use his going into the business—he'd do more harm than good there."

"Well, we want him to have a little holiday before he starts work of any kind," said Lady Pendre, almost apologetically. Barbara often had the effect of making her feel apologetic, as if she really had no right to express her opinion. "He wants a good long rest." She looked at him and smiled, and suddenly she thought of the little crucifix that lay hidden under his shirt. It made him seem nearer somehow, and dearer.

"Oh, Dad isn't unreasonable," said Barbara, coolly; "he's quite willing to give him six months' holiday—in fact, he wants him to have it—he sees it wouldn't be the slightest use to fling him into an office in his present mood."

"Six months!" said Eustace, contemptuously. "But that isn't the point. The point is that he wants to try to make an elder son of me and it isn't to be done. I simply can't take Phip's place. I wish Dad had never accepted that beastly title. I've always pitied King George for having had to take on his job—he must have hated it. Why, you'll be wanting me to marry Pamela next!" he added fiercely.

"You needn't be afraid. Pamela wouldn't look at you after Phip," responded Barbara tartly.

"It depends how much she wanted to be Lady Pendre," said Eustace.

All the time he was secretly furious with himself for his almost childish display of ill-humor, aware that it was absurd and undignified. He oughtn't to have allowed himself to be dragged into this futile discussion with Barbara. And yet, confronted by her superior gaze, her calm reasonableness, he hadn't been able to repress his irritation. Even in his nursery days her contempt for his shortcomings had exasperated him in precisely the same way. She could still tear his nerves to ribbons.

He knew, too, that he had been less than fair to Pamela, who, despite her slight tendency to intrigue, had been truly devoted to his brother. But it was this quest of money, wealth, and success, to the exclusion of all holy and beautiful and desirable things, that so nauseated him.

"I'm going out with Vicky," he said, moving toward the door. "If you talk to Dad again about it, Barbara, you can tell him just what I've said."

His voice was still sullen, but as he passed his mother, their eyes met and he smiled at her. He realized then that her expression at that moment was very beautiful, full of a tender maternal solicitude and pity. She wasn't angry or annoyed with him as he feared that she might be. She could see past the petulant surface ill-humor to the very real and profound need that was asserting itself in his heart. And he recalled with a fresh pang her swift sudden movement when she had stooped and kissed the silver crucifix that had been his companion both in Palestine and Iraq.

4

When they were alone Barbara turned to her mother.

"What is going to happen?" she said, in a tone of real concern. "We can do nothing with him—he's worse than he ever was. And he and Vicky must be particularly bad for each other. I hope he will really decide to go away for a few months; he'll get on Dad's nerves so dreadfully if he stays. And then with all this silly fuss about Vicky!"

"I'm sure Eustace finds his position a very difficult one," said Lady Pendre. "I think myself he ought to be quite free for a time. And I doubt his ever standing that office life—he isn't in sympathy—he'd always hate it." She sighed.

"Why on earth can't he accept his new position quietly without so much talk? Comparing himself to King George!" Barbara's voice was full of resentful irony. She was so sane and normal herself that she sometimes seemed to her mother scarcely human.

"He never wished to be the elder son—he hates the idea," said Lady Pendre, "and coming back has brought it all home to him. There was bound to be an outburst of some kind. Eustace always speaks his mind. We must be patient and try to help him."

She couldn't of course show Barbara how entirely she was with her son in his new aims. She could put herself in his place with an anguish of sympathy and see with his eyes. . . . She could remember the futile rebellion of her own youth, never voiced aloud, scarcely even suspected by her weak and dissolute father. But the young were different now; they were informed with a new spirit; they did not accept blindly; they looked and weighed, and took nothing on trust.

"It seems to me that everyone's nerves are on edge here," continued Barbara. "And I'm sure it's Eustace' fault—he's in such a queer mood—takes offense at the least little thing. He's worse than most demobbed men. Vicky's as cross and rude as she can be just because Dad has put his foot down about that silly flirtation with Martin Sedgwick, and Pamela says she's so unbearable to her that she really doesn't think she'll be able to remain here much longer. She feels Vicky's hostility so very much. I'd ask Pam to come back with me for a bit when I go, but you know how Gerard hates my having people staying in the house, especially a woman. He likes me to be quite free to go about with him, and I really must consider him."

"Of course you must. And Pamela can quite well go to her own home for a little. She hasn't been there for more than a year."

"There's no need for her to go away at all," said Barbara, with decision. "Can't you speak to Vicky about her behavior?"

"No. I never do, you know," said Lady Pendre, almost as if in self-exculpation; she really felt so very inefficient beside Barbara. "But your father has, of course."

"You let her do just as she likes!"

Lady Pendre was silent. All through her married life she had just stood aside. Let others do the correcting, rebuking, exhorting! She had resigned her share, in little things as well as in great.

"Dad must speak to her again, then. Vicky's getting a little beyond herself."

"Oh, don't say anything about it, Barbara. Your father's inclined to be hard on her as it is. He was so very annoyed about Martin. And the poor child is so miserable!"

"But this sort of thing can't possibly go on. It would be only kind to put a stop to it—it's so uncomfortable for everyone, and bad for Vicky, too, to think she can behave just as she likes!"

"I'd rather Pamela went away than that," said Lady Pendre. It was always her inclination to shirk a difficult situation rather than to face it boldly and deal with it decisively and vigorously. And since Eustace' return she had perceived with something like dismay that Vicky's subtle antagonism to Pamela had deepened and become more avowed and explicit. But it was no part of her plan to step in and ameliorate matters, or even to warn Vicky of the folly of her attitude, since her father would be little likely to listen to the suggestion that Pamela should go away for a time.

It might be that he had other hopes concerning her, though he had not told his wife so. But perhaps Eustace had not been so far from the truth when he had said bitterly they would be wanting him to marry Pamela next. Lady Pendre felt certain that some such idea was slowly germinating in her husband's brain. He was deeply attached to the girl, openly preferring her to his own daughter, and Pamela was clever enough to make herself indispensable to him. Once during the illness of his secretary she had offered to help him with his correspondence, and had proved herself industrious and competent. She wielded a considerable influence over the hard, inexorable man. And especially she influenced him in regard to Vicky. The breach between father and daughter grew every day more apparent. Lady Pendre did not blame Pamela entirely for this unhappy state of things Vicky herself was unfortunately very deeply to blame. Her wild rebellious spirit, goaded by the anguish of being separated from Martin, was at the root of much of her own unhappiness. She was perpetually coming into conflict with her father about trifles.

It might be that the possibility of a marriage between Eustace and Pamela had occurred to Vicky. With her quick imagination, a ready intuition, she had perhaps divined her father's hopes on this point. Nothing could possibly have been more distasteful to her than such a marriage for her favorite brother, and she would be certain to combat it with all her puny force. There was a strong admixture of jealousy in her attitude toward Pamela. She had seen this girl slowly but surely usurping the place that should have been hers. Pamela behaved and was treated like a beloved elder daughter, but she should not, in addition to this, rob her of Eustace.

What Pamela's feelings on the subject were, it was more difficult to say. That she had loved Philip very much, Lady Pendre did not doubt; but she was hardly the woman to be blind or indifferent to the worldly advantages accruing to the position of the future Lady Pendre. That Philip was his father's elder son had no doubt increased his value in her eyes.

Lady Pendre looked up, aware that her daughter's eyes were fixed upon her.

"I've sometimes thought that perhaps Pamela and Ernest Soames—" she began tentatively.

"Ernest? Why, I'd no idea they knew each other," said Barbara.

Her mother saw that for some reason or other the idea was not welcome to her. Some years before, he had made Barbara an offer of marriage, but she was already in love with Gerard Hammond, and had been resolute in her refusal. Lord Pendre liked Soames; he had not been at all averse to the idea. But Barbara was intensely ambitious, and to settle down on an adjoining property with a man who rarely left it except for purposes of sport, did not coincide with her views of amusement. It was sufficiently dull at Pendre—they had so few neighbors—but it would have been far, far more dull at Moth Hill Park.

"He's been coming here a great deal lately—more than he's ever done before," remarked Lady Pendre. "And it struck me that perhaps he admired Pamela."

"Does she like him—encourage him?" inquired Barbara.

"Oh, she never shows her feelings. But I'm almost sure he likes her. He had been here so little of late years."

Barbara meditated upon this in silence. She, too, had thought and even hoped that perhaps Eustace—! But after his speech that morning he had shown them the necessity of approaching him with prudence and caution. His suspicions were already aroused; they must therefore proceed warily.

"I think if I were Pamela I should try not to see too much of Ernest just now," said Barbara, oracularly.

"Oh, I don't suppose that it's ever entered her head that he comes to see her," hastily interpolated Lady Pendre.

"But who on earth should he want to see, then?" inquired her daughter.

"Oh, he likes a chat with your father," replied Lady Pendre.

CHAPTER V

The Shadow

1

EUSTACE was walking with Vicky in the woods that garmented the slopes above Pendre. They were each holding by a leash a dog of fiercely predatory proclivities. The girl was flushed with exercise and with the effort of keeping her canine companion under due restraint. She wore rough tweed country clothes, with a short skirt and loose-fitting leather-bound jacket, and a blue woolen scarf twisted round her neck. Her hair was uncovered. There was a contrast between the homeliness of her brown garments, and her tiny, delicately-drawn face, with its deep haunting eyes.

They pushed their way through the tangled undergrowth, leafless now but sharp and thorny and inclined to fly back and scourge the face of the unwary intruder. The dogs yelped and struggled for freedom, sniffing the proximity of furred and feathered quarry, and almost going mad with excitement when they startled a magnificent cock-pheasant, that flew away with a shrill cry of alarm. The path through the woods was narrow, and slightly slippery from recent frost. Vicky followed Eustace during the ascent.

They were clear of the woods at last. Gorse and bramble bushes broke the monotony of the hillside and straggled toward the summit of Moth Hill, whose green turfed slopes were cleft in the center by a narrow chain of wind-bitten trees descending perpendicularly. The two curves of its summit, springing sharply from the copse to right and left, imbued it with something of the fantastic aspect of a moth with outspread wings, of which the trees formed the body. Floating cloud-shadows made exquisite purple patterns on the green grass. From the top there was a beautiful view, stretching westward to the far misty silhouettes of the Welsh mountains, while below them was the long blue line of the Irish sea, with its broad bar of surf shining beyond the brown Pendre woods and the meadows that sloped almost to the shore.

Three or four little coast towns revealed themselves by the blue mist of smoke that hung over their clustered red houses. St. David's Bay in the far distance was the nearest town of any importance. Nearby was the modern seaside resort of Llyn, whose villas and houses were gradually invading the lower slopes of the hills.

As they neared the top, they saw two figures approaching them from the opposite direction. One was a young girl, perhaps a year or two older than Victoria Wingrave, the other a thin, dark, elderly woman of slightly foreign aspect. Eustace glanced at the girl. She was tall and straight as a wand, with brilliant golden-red hair that produced an almost dazzling effect of color. Her eyes were darkly blue, and her complexion was of that pure pink and white that so often accompanies brightly-colored hair. It was a beautiful little face, he decided, although he had had but one swift passing glimpse of it. Something about the girl had given him the impression of happy and vigorous youth. Her clear untroubled eyes seemed to assure him that she had no perplexing problems to disturb the serenity of her heart and mind.

The strangers passed them quickly; they were walking at a good pace. Eustace stood aside on the grass to make way for them on the narrow path. He thought that the girl bent her head slightly in acknowledgement of his action. Then he and Vicky resumed their climb. It was not till they had reached the top of Moth Hill that he turned to her and said:

"Who are they? Do you know them?"

Vicky often lamented the scarcity of girls of her own age in a neighborhood that indeed offered them few acquaintances of any kind. Yet here was a girl who at first glance seemed an eminently desirable companion for her, and who could assuredly live at no great distance from Pendre.

"The girl is Miss Tresham, from Glen Cottage—you know that tiny place just outside Moth Hill Park. It belongs to Mr. Soames, and he let it to Mrs. Tresham about two years ago. She is very delicate, and that lady lives with them. I think she's some relation."

"Hasn't Mummie called on them?" asked Eustace.

"No. I did ask her to—I liked the look of the girl—I'd seen her once or twice in Llyn. There's something about them—against them, I think. Intriguing, isn't it? Dad doesn't want us to know them."

She spoke satirically. Here was a girl with whom she felt she might be intimate—there was something so young and joyous about her—she had such a happy smiling face. Instead of which she was forced to depend upon Pamela Webb for companionship. Sometimes, but very rarely, a girl was invited to spend a few weeks at Pendre in the summer. But Vicky was never allowed any choice in the matter, and she had little in common with most of these carefully-selected guests.

Eustace was not at all susceptible, and he came to the conclusion that the girl must have been unusually pretty and attractive to arrest his attention and interest in the way she had done.

"I'd like to know her—I'm sure she'd be *simpatica,*" continued Vicky, in an aggrieved tone. "But the Powers never like the same people I do."

"She is certainly very pretty," agreed Eustace, meditatively.

"Besides, they must think it so awfully queer of us not to call. Living hardly a mile away, and knowing lots of our friends." Vicky's voice was still resentful.

Glen Cottage lay between Pendre and Llyn, tucked away in the hollow of Moth Hill. Vicky had often passed it in her walks with Miss Brigstocke, and wished that she had known its inmates.

"Oh, Eustie, isn't it perfectly rotten here? Don't you long to go away? I do, and yet I feel it might be so heavenly at Pendre!"

He was silent. He did not wish to increase her dissatisfaction by revealing anything of his own. Vicky had reached the age when youth, inevitably and even wholesomely, spreads its wings for flight and freedom. They had both indeed arrived at a critical moment in their respective lives, he consciously, and Vicky still unconsciously.

"Is marriage the only way of escape? I shall never be allowed to marry Martin, and if they choose someone for me, he's sure to be exactly the same kind of person as Gerard. I should feel worse than ever imprisoned if I were in Barbara's shoes. Knowing there was never to be anything else but Gerard and babies!" She made a little *moue* of disgust. Her critical, superior brother-in-law was intensely antipathetic to her. Of course, she liked the little Philip; he was such a handsome sturdy intelligent child, but it was difficult to approach him with any degree of intimacy, so surrounded and enveloped was he by regulations and restrictions embodying the latest hygienic methods of infant-rearing.

"Well, I hope you will marry, one of these days. If it's not the only way of escape it's a fairly safe one for a woman. I wish, too, it could be Martin—you'd suit each other down to the ground. He's an awfully good sort, and he's a clever chap—he's bound to get on. I daresay they'll give in when they see you're really serious about it. Of course, at present they think you're rather too young."

"I'm as old as Barbara was when she got engaged to Gerard."

"You're more of a baby than she ever was," he reminded her.

Behind Moth Hill the scenery was beautiful—wooded hills, park-like lands, fertile fields, and a river that broadened out to a beautiful lake. Far off the Welsh mountains were dimly visible, their summits wrapped in torn rags of cloud.

"Don't you know anything more about the Treshams?" inquired Eustace, his thoughts suddenly reverting to the girl of whom he had had that one enchanting glimpse.

"Only that Mrs. Tresham is partly Italian. Her husband was English and he's been dead a long time. She's only got that one girl and they're hard up, I believe. They must be or they wouldn't live in that tiny cottage. Someone said they were Roman Catholics—I expect it's true, for they never go to the parish church."

Roman Catholics? The words produced a curious impression upon Eustace, and he was unable to analyze it sufficiently to determine at once whether it were one of interest or of slight repugnance. But, on the whole, he decided that this new knowledge rather added to than detracted from the charm of Miss Tresham. And he thought of her again, as if viewing her from a new standpoint. He had felt attracted by her beauty, her joyousness that yet had nothing to do with gaiety, and held even a serious quality, as if it sprang from some deep fundamental contentment.

Why did his mother hold aloof from them? Why had his father vetoed any conventional approach to these tenants of the little cottage, so close to their own gates? As a rule, Lady Pendre called upon all their neighbors; she was always quite friendly, though never intimate. She was the least snobbish of women and did not care if people were rich or poor, well-born or the reverse. Eustace sought in vain for a solution to the enigma. It could only be because the Powers feared that a girlish friendship might spring up between Miss Tresham and Vicky. Why they should dislike this idea was another matter. His speculation on the point reached no profitable conclusion. Lord Pendre was often harsh and arbitrary in his decrees, and always he feared that association with modern, independent spirits would still further increase Vicky's natural tendency to insubordination and mutiny.

The girl's figure, instinct with grace and health and young supple strength, as he had seen it outlined against the cold pure blue of the winter sky on the top of Moth Hill, seemed in a sense to haunt him.

So far he had not formulated any actual plan for making her acquaintance, since while he lived under his father's roof he was resolved as far as possible to accept his tyranny. Besides, it would be foolish to annoy him in small matters when his great overt act of rebellion was so soon to be accomplished. But that did not prevent him from secretly resenting Lord Pendre's refusal to know the Treshams. It seemed to him an act of gratuitous tyranny. And it could surely have nothing to do with their religion, since his father was obviously so indifferent to spiritual things. His weekly pilgrimage to the parish church was considered essential as an example to those wavering souls who might otherwise have deemed their own presence there unnecessary. To connect it with his own spiritual profit would certainly never have occurred to him.

"I've only seen Miss Tresham two or three times, but I can't help liking her, though we've never spoken to each other," said Vicky, breaking in upon his thoughts. "I feel we might be friends. It 'ud be something to have a friend of my own age in this howling wilderness," she added discontentedly.

He smiled at her. "You're as rebellious as ever," he told her.

"Things don't change here, but I don't feel half so bad when you are at home. I hope you'll stay for ages."

His face clouded. Even he, with his superior patience and acquired philosophy, felt that he couldn't stand too much of Pendre just now. But, then, he had tasted freedom and independence, and Vicky was really hardly old enough as yet for complete emancipation. Their cases could not be compared.

She slipped her hand in his arm, and they walked on, side by side. The dogs, released now from bondage, were scampering wildly over the grass, rolling and playing roughly together, uttering short barks, attacking each other with huge open maws that looked menacing but were in reality perfectly friendly.

"Eustie," she said presently, "has it ever occurred to you that the Powers would like you to marry Pamela?"

He was slightly startled, for he had believed that this fact had somehow escaped her notice.

"It has indeed," he replied, dryly. "But I'm not going to, so make your mind easy. And I'm not such a coxcomb as to suppose she would marry me even if I asked her." His smile reassured her.

"But you might make her care," Vicky observed, comforted rather than convinced.

"I'm not going to try. Vicky, you mustn't think because you're fool enough to be so fond of me that I'm quite irresistible!"

"I've been simply so horribly afraid of it, you know," she whispered, clinging to him a little. "She's so sweet to you—she's always trying to attract your attention—to catch you alone. And she hates me because she knows I see through all her little plots and plans. I do wish she'd go away. . . ."

"Vicky, my child,—you're imagining things!"

"Oh, it isn't imagination—I only wish it were! It's the truth, and you must have noticed it too. Yesterday after lunch she made an excuse to go and look for a book in the library. And I'm sure it was because she knew you were there alone. She was just half an hour finding it—I timed her," Vicky added, maliciously.

This little revelation made Eustace feel slightly uncomfortable. He had tried to persuade himself that Pamela wasn't for some occult reason endeavoring to enlist his support against Vicky. That she had followed him into the library was true, and soon she had called upon him to help her in the search. He had had a horrid malevolent little doubt at the time as to whether the book were there at all. But she had ended by discovering it. Purposely his manner to her had been icy but polite.

Of course he had perceived that his father hoped he would take Philip's place in this as in other things. It was not quite fortuitously that he had exclaimed to Barbara: "Why, you'll be wanting me to marry Pamela next!" He seemed to have known what was in their minds since the first day of his return. In other circumstances he might have shown the girl a more kindly friendliness, but this suspicion had put him strongly on his guard. She and Barbara were intimate friends

—there was no knowing what they might discuss in those "heart-to-heart" talks over Mrs. Hammond's fire. Barbara was quite capable of delicately hinting to Pamela that such an arrangement would certainly be smiled upon approvingly by the Powers.

But aloud he only said: "You mustn't be such a little beast to Pamela. It'll only make trouble."

"I'm not really a beast, at least I don't want to be. But some people do put one's back up, don't they, Eustie? And unfortunately it's generally just the ones we have to live with! I was frightfully sorry for her at first, of course—we all were. But it's more than two years ago—we none of us feel it as much as we did then, except perhaps poor Mummie. . . ."

They stood there for a few minutes in silence on the crest of Moth Hill. Although it was still early in March, it was impossible not to discern a faint bloom upon the brown woods, while here and there a pale drift of almond blossom, the sharp emerald of young larch boughs, declared themselves with a more emphatic note of color. The wind that raced over the hill, driving stately battalions of cloud before it, was young and vigorous—the very child of spring. . . .

2

"There's something I want to tell you, Eustie."

Vicky pulled her brother's sleeve, and he knew by experience that a highly confidential communication would follow.

"Is it about Martin?" he said. "I'm not sure that I ought to encourage you—!"

"It's got nothing to do with Martin. Don't be absurd—I've told you all there is to know about him. No—it's something much more serious than that."

They walked a few paces down the hillside. The path was slippery, and Vicky leaned a little on her brother's arm.

"It was something that happened—when the telegram came. About Phip, you know."

Eustace looked a little uncomfortable. Secretly he had always been thankful that he had escaped that bitter hour at Pendre when the news of the death of the first-born had reached them. He was not sure, even now, that he wished to hear any painful details. He would have stopped his sister if it had been possible, but he dared not. Since his return he had been aware of a new and raw sensitiveness that was frequently apparent in her. Little, quite unlikely things seemed to hurt her.

"Tell me," he said gently.

"Dad got it first, of course—you know, he always opens telegrams. He came into the green drawing-room where Mummie and I were sitting. He had the telegram in his hand, and we saw by his face that something awful had happened. Oh, Eustie, I was so afraid it was you!" She twined her arm round his neck. "But Mummie guessed at once, for she got up and said: 'Is it Phip?' She had a queer stunned look, and Dad caught hold of her and held her up. She took the paper from his hand and read it. I think I was crying—it seemed so terrible—and then she said in a very quiet dead tone, 'It was I who killed him, Hugo.' Then she went out of the room—I didn't see her again for several days. She stayed in bed—she didn't want anyone near her. Pamela insisted upon going in to see her, but I didn't try—I knew how much she wanted to be alone. But what do you think she meant by saying that, Eustie? It was such—nonsense—wasn't it? When we all know she loved him better than anybody!"

"I can't possibly imagine what she could have meant," Eustace answered. But a certain sense of mental disquietude, of which for several days he had been acutely conscious, was appreciably deepened by Vicky's little recital. "She was always so awfully wrapped up in Phip. As you say, she cared more for him than for anyone. And he deserved it too—he was such a splendid son. He'd never given her an hour's anxiety until he went to France. She couldn't really have known what she was saying—she must have been like someone talking in their sleep. It was absurd, of course, for her to think she was in the slightest degree responsible."

But Vicky had forgotten no detail of that little episode, and always she had felt convinced that her mother had meant what she said.

It had all been sharply etched upon her brain; her mother standing there, swaying a little despite the strong support of her husband's arm, her face deathly pale, her quiet dead voice saying those terrible words without a hint of emotion: *It was I who killed him, Hugo* . . . And Lord Pendre, ghastly in his pallor, listening. . . .

"Dad knew what she meant. He looked as if she'd struck him," Vicky continued. She had not forgotten her father's stricken expression, and ever since then she had believed that there was some terrible secret between him and her mother, known only to themselves.

"Pamela wasn't there?" Eustace asked.

Vicky shook her head. "I've always been so thankful that she didn't hear it. She was out for a walk—she didn't come back till much later." The relief showed now in the girl's face. "You see, in my heart I don't trust Pamela."

"Oh, I think—I hope—you're wrong," Eustace assured her, earnestly.

Still, he was thankful to revert to the subject of Pamela. Vicky's recital had impressed him more than he would have cared to reveal, accentuating his mental malaise, making him ask himself a hundred questions to which there was no answer.

"She's so possessive. She can't rest till she's intimate with people. Look how she's got hold of Dad—he consults her about all sorts of things. And she eggs him on to bully me!" Vicky's eyes flashed. "And I can hardly ever get near Mummie—Pamela's always there. Oh, don't please fall in love with her, Eustie—it's the one thing I feel I couldn't bear."

"I'm not likely to. I hope I'm not such a fool as to fall in love with anyone for ages. But if I did it wouldn't be with Pamela."

But even as he spoke, the face he had so recently seen flashed before his mental vision. Two dark blue eyes met his steadily. The mouth was beautifully formed, the nose straight and rather short, the cheeks were tinged with a deep rose-color like the bloom on some ripe fruit.

He wished he could have heard her voice, but she had been silent when she passed him. . . .

"You can't think what an enormous relief it is to me to hear you say that, Eustie," Vicky was murmuring.

"I'm glad of that," he said.

"Life is such a terrifying experience whichever way you look at it," she went on.

"Well, the only way is to stand up to it bravely. Not to let oneself be frightened."

She looked up into his face, with grave penetrating eyes.

"If one were quite sure there was really Something . . . trying to help us . . . *caring* what happened to us . . . being sorry for us and all that . . . it would be easier I think . . ."

Startled, he turned toward her, his eyes shining. Oh, she was half-unconsciously treading the same path as himself—perhaps traveling toward the same bourne. Questioning, hoping. . . . With the first fear of life upon her—its first terrors darkening her vision—she was looking round pitifully for help.

Something . . . trying to help . . . Caring . . . being sorry. . . .

"But I'm certain there is, Vicky!" he cried eagerly. "I was so sure of it during the War. I felt it even when things were at their worst. One can't believe that Our Lord could do so much for us—living on earth—dying for us in such torture for our redemption—only to leave us alone forever after, with no sure message of His Truth to guide us! It's just that message I want to discover—where it is exactly—and who can tell me about it."

His grave words, uttered not without emotion, sobered her. She found them strangely comforting.

"When you find it, Eustie, if you ever do, you must tell me."

"Of course I will—you shall be the first. You see, this kind of life we're leading here—let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die—isn't good enough. It reminds one too much of the man in the parable who built the enormous barns and stored up wealth for many years and then had to die that night. And money-making isn't good enough. It's all for the body, isn't it? Nothing for the miserable little starved soul. And I've an idea that the soul wants her nourishment and education and training just like the body and mind. That's going to be my job for the next few months, my dear—to try to find out. You mustn't mind if I go away—there's nothing doing at Pendre!"

He stared before him with a queer far-off expression in his shining deep-set eyes.

3

Before them the green land dipped almost treeless from Moth Hill to the sea. Between the two lay the little red-brick modern town of Llyn, wrapped in the thin blue haze of its own smoke. Scattered upon its outskirts, on the low strip of flat land behind the town as well as on the first slopes of the hills that lay further back from the sea, there were innumerable, jaunty, red and white villas, seldom more than two stories high, while many of them were quite frankly bungalows. Their architecture was modern, and they were evidently planned upon labor-saving lines. High sloping red roofs, small leaded panes, rough-cast white walls, characterized the greater number of them. Green railings enclosed their prim neat gardens. Many of them belonged to well-to-do people from the great midland manufacturing towns, or to Liverpool merchants, and were often only occupied during the summer months or for an occasional week-end. Beyond the town of Llyn the Irish Sea showed its limitless blue on this day of early spring. The air was full of its clean salt tang . . .

"Oh, I wish you were going to stay here," Vicky said. "I do love having you here. And Dad's temper has been ever so much worse since darling old Phip was killed. Why must people show their sorrow for the dead by being hateful to the living?"

Eustace was silent, but the look he gave her was full of compassion.

"Lately he's been quite fiendish. And now with Martin abroad. . . ." The tears stood in her eyes.

She made him feel as if they were standing together and alone upon some remote and isolated spot quite apart from the rest of the family. His father—Pamela—Barbara—all seemed in some strange manner arrayed against them. And his mother? Her position was still, as it had always been to him, utterly enigmatical, and he wondered now a little idly whether she were not perhaps the loneliest and most isolated of them all. No one could possibly regard her as one of the active protagonists of the little family drama. She held herself aloof—even proudly aloof. Yet, surely, in her heart her sympathies must go out to one side or the other.

"What's the matter with us, Eustie?" Vicky's voice was strained and emotional.

"The matter with us?" he echoed, puzzled at both her words and manner. "Why, what should there be, dear Vicky?"

In trying to reassure her, he was painfully aware that he was endeavoring also to quiet those misgivings that were tormenting his own heart, eating up its very peace.

"I feel as if there was something hanging over us—threatening us! What have we done to deserve it? Which of us has done anything wrong? I think I've felt it more since you came back . . ." She clung to him.

"You're not very complimentary," he told her with a mocking smile that was slightly forced. But it was all part of his effort to calm her—to prevent her if possible from pursuing her dreadful investigations as to the nature of that mystery. For again he was aware of an extreme uneasiness. Was there anything wrong? Was anything menacing them? And if so, why? He tried to shake himself free from his own secret assent to her words.

But he could not stop her. Speak she must, and he had to listen.

"I feel as if God were against us," she whispered in a stricken tone. "What *can* we have done to offend Him? What can any of us have done?"

They stood apart now, facing each other on the bleak hillside. Both were pale as death, and their eyes so strangely alike, were bright with fear.

All the time he knew that she had only put his own secret and tormenting fear into words.

"Nothing! Nothing! It can't be that," he found himself repeating mechanically.

"But you feel it too, don't you, Eustie? Oh, can you truthfully say that you don't feel it?"

"Oh, I feel something, of course," he admitted cautiously. "But it's so intangible—I've often wondered if it wasn't all my imagination. Only, for me, it's nothing new. I felt it before I went away. I've felt it for more years than I can count—as far back as I can remember anything at all."

They walked in silence down the hill, and then followed the moist road that ran between tall hedges from Llyn to Pendre. Above them a lark was singing, and some sea-gulls flew restlessly. They had descended into the strip of land that lay between the sea and the low green hills, spreading away to the south. There was no one about. The place was chill, damp and deserted. Llyn was behind them now, modern, banal, commonplace.

Eustace never forgot that walk home. He felt as if Destiny, grim and malevolent and ever vigilant, were dogging their heels.

"Anyhow, I can't believe it's our fault," he got out at last. "I don't see how it can be. We've done nothing. We lead just the ordinary materialistic lives that most people seem to when they've got enough money. Yet there is something . . ." he paused. "A shadow. I'm so glad we've had the courage to speak of it to each other, Vicky. Whatever it is we'll share it, and perhaps it'll never seem quite so bad again, now we've taken it out and looked at it." He slipped his hand in hers comfortingly. He was trying to console her, regretting perhaps that he had allowed something of his own morbid fears to escape him.

Vicky looked at him, relieved, but still troubled.

"Sometimes I think Mummie knows," she said.

"Perhaps she does."

If only, he thought, because of those bitter, self-accusing words that she had uttered when the dread news came. For him those words had lifted in some slight degree the mystery that enveloped her. The shadow . . . It was as if she had drawn aside a curtain, permitting them a glimpse of something hidden and terrible, though still unexplained.

"You couldn't ask her, could you, Eustie?"

"Not if I know it! Vicky dear—we must keep our own counsel!"

His voice held an authoritative ring. They walked on in silence. Already it was growing dusk, and the Pendre woods were becoming like black blots against the pallor of the hills. The sea was dimmed by mists. They could hear the sustained thunder of those breaking waves on the long line of shore.

It was a relief to get back to the house, to take off their muddy boots and join their mother in the green drawing-room. Pamela was there, too, in her strange white and gold perfection that always made Vicky feel clumsy and ill-dressed. But, anyhow, she wasn't afraid of her any more. There wasn't the slightest chance of Eustace falling in love with her. He didn't seem even to like her very much, and most people liked Pamela.

But after their talk that afternoon, Vicky felt that her friendship with her brother had entered upon a new phase. It had become permanent, and she felt that whatever happened in the future, they could never be less to each other. They had *shared* something together. There was something close and intimate between them.

Lady Pendre looked so calm and tranquil and undisturbed, so even normal, that Eustace almost felt as if he had allowed Vicky's wild and always rather morbid imagination to affect him unreasonably; he was even a trifle ashamed that he had revealed anything of his own uneasiness to his sister. The shadow seemed momentarily to have lifted a little . . .

Only, what had his mother meant—what *could* she have meant in the name of all that was sane—when she said that she had killed Philip? There was no explaining away that impetuous utterance, charged with a profound significance he could not hope to penetrate. It had been dragged from her in a moment of dire calamity when the long silence of years had been broken, and it seemed to him that this speech alone confirmed and substantiated all their fears. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Forbidden Fruit

1

EUSTACE was motoring homeward, driving himself in the little two-seater which was generally reserved for Vicky's use. But to-day she had refused to accompany him, preferring to remain indoors as she had a slight cold. He had left her sitting over the schoolroom fire, reading a novel and eating chocolates.

After a few days of bright, sunny, and spring-like weather, winter had returned. There had been a slight fall of snow, and the wind was as keen as a knife.

Eustace had been over to St. David's Bay, which was the nearest shopping town of any importance, offering a wider range to intending purchasers than Llyn. He had escaped directly after luncheon, fearing that his father might suggest Pamela's accompanying him. He was not in the mood for conversation to-day; he preferred solitude.

The snow had powdered lightly the hard frozen road, whose puddles were transformed to blue ice. Lightly powdered, too, were the meadows, stretching almost to the sea, although interruptions of green were here and there visible. Broad white streaks striped the red roofs of Llyn. The sea lay like a colorless lake, faintly blurred by mist on the horizon. The gulls flashed past like silver scimitars, in their restless, uneasy flight.

Moth Hill was deeply covered in snow, and the sparse trees that grew in the cleft near the summit, stood up deeply brown in the white wilderness. The sky was pale and almost colorless, but growing a little grey with premature dusk.

At the turn of the road just before reaching Llyn, Eustace came upon a small car, almost the counterpart of the one he was driving. It had come to a stop just short of a deep ditch on the right upon a steep slope, and he supposed that there had been a break-down of the machinery, since a slim form clad in a long brown leather coat was half-hidden beneath it. Two feet were visible, covered with thick brown knitted stockings and boyish-looking shoes.

Eustace pulled up, observing these details, and feeling quite uncertain as to whether that prone figure belonged to a boy or a girl. At a little distance he saw a tall woman pacing the frozen path, stamping her feet not with impatience, but in an obvious endeavor to keep warm. Eustace quickly recognized her dark rather aquiline face, and it gave him the clue he required, revealing the identity of the person who was partially concealed from him. She was the woman who had accompanied Miss Tresham in her walk that day upon Moth Hill, not a week ago. His heart gave a quick throb. That prone boyish-looking form must assuredly belong to Miss Tresham herself.

The elder woman had turned in her walk and was coming closer. Eustace' eyes met hers, and he leapt down from his seat, took off his hat and advanced toward the little group. The motoring world has its own freemasonry, and, realizing this, he devoutly blessed the kindly fate that had brought him hither at an apparently critical juncture.

"I say, can I be of any use?" he asked, with the smile that had won him friends half the world over. It lit up his deep-set smouldering eyes, and gave a rare charm to his face.

The long dark eyes that met his twinkled. The cold nipping air had turned those olive cheeks to a bluish grey. Miss Tresham's companion held out a hand comfortably though not elegantly gloved in knitted wool.

"Well, she doesn't seem to be making much progress," she said, with a smile. "She's learned how to do running repairs, but one never knows how long they'll take."

She went a step or two nearer to the car.

"Nella," she called, "would you like Mr. Wingrave to help you? He's offered to, and I expect he knows more about it than you do."

So she knew who he was, and hadn't hesitated to pronounce his name. It saved him from all trouble of introducing himself. He stood there watching, while the slender form wriggled itself free and assumed an upright position. The somewhat flushed face that now revealed itself under the brim of a plain brown leather hat struck Eustace even more forcibly than it had done on the occasion of their first encounter upon Moth Hill. Often since then he had tried to assure himself that she couldn't really have been as pretty as all that, as perfect as she had seemed to him in that first elusive, tantalizing glimpse of her. It wasn't possible. . . . But now as he looked upon that glowing face, those shining dark blue eyes, those parted smiling lips, the pale presentment of her seemed to vanish, or else perhaps it became subtly incorporated with the living woman who was just greeting him in friendliest fashion.

She held out her hand, slightly soiled from her recent attempt at performing running repairs.

"How awfully good of you! I was so hoping someone might turn up soon. I'm Nella Tresham, as I suppose you know, and this is my friend, Mrs. Welby."

"I remember seeing you one day on Moth Hill when I was with my sister," he said. "She told me who you were."

She smiled at him, and there was a delicious hint of roguishness in her face, that enchanted him. It was just as if she had said: "I suppose there's no harm in our speaking, although your mother refuses to know us?" Just a hint of secret understanding, of youth calling to youth, sure of response.

Aloud she only said: "I've been here about half an hour already, trying to get the old thing to move. Do you find that when anything happens it's always something you never learnt to cope with? Poor Mrs. Welby must be perfectly frozen—although she's getting used to my fiddling. Would you really mind seeing what's the matter? I confess that I'm utterly up a tree, and have been all this time, though I was too proud to own it!"

Her merry laugh rang out; to Eustace it was full of delicious, musical sounds. He took some tools from her and proceeded to examine the car.

His head was in rather a whirl, but outwardly he looked perfectly composed. Oh, if he had prayed for such a chance as this of speaking to her it could hardly have been more admirably contrived! They were here together upon this lonely frozen road with the spring dusk deepening about them, and the gulls wheeling above their heads like restless uneasy spirits uttering sharp cries of agony. Mrs. Welby simply didn't count. She had resumed her steady tramp upon the hard path, filled with the determination to keep as warm as was possible under such inclement conditions. A woman whose patience and good-humor were evidently beyond question. He felt that he loved her for marching so briskly away, especially when she vanished completely beyond the next bend. She looked round to cry out: "Call me when you're ready," before she turned the corner. Had Eustace been nearer he might have perceived a humorous gleam in those dark eyes.

Thus for twenty minutes he was alone, quite alone, with Nella Tresham, although the conditions did not at first admit of anything but a rather one-sided conversation, carried on chiefly by the lady.

It would not be fair to say that Eustace did deliberately prolong the operation of inducing the car to start, in order to secure a brief reprieve from the separation that loomed ahead of them. But at the same time he performed his task with a thoroughness that was at least conscientious, while Nella's thrilling young voice fell agreeably upon his ears. She was a chatterbox, as Mrs. Welby had felt constrained to remind her from her earliest years, and Eustace was thankful to discover it for himself. He felt tongue-tied and slightly embarrassed (it was a wonder, considering all things, that she should be so charming to a Wingrave!) and while assuring himself that the adventure could have no possible sequel he felt convinced that nothing should prevent him from seeing her again whenever he wished to do so. And this in defiance of all parental opposition.

"You've only lately come back, haven't you?" Nella's clear voice was saying. "You mustn't be surprised, but we hear all about the doings at the Park in this forlorn hole! We almost knew the exact hour when you were due to arrive. Uneasy is the light that beats upon a throne!—by the way, that doesn't sound right, but you know what I mean. I'd like you awfully to come over to Glen Cottage one day and see my mother. And bring that ripping little sister of yours with the tragic eyes. I have often wanted to stop and ask her why she was so frightfully melancholy and miserable. We always eye each other when we meet—I know she's as anxious to speak to me as I am to speak to her. Only Mrs. Welby, who by the way is much more prudent and discreet than either Mother or myself, says, Better not! Your sister mightn't like it—your mother could know us if she wanted to . . . mustn't go against parents—you know the kind of thing people like Mrs. Welby *have* to say! But, Mr. Wingrave, you don't mind my asking you, do you? What *is* the matter with us?"

And suddenly her voice changed from grave to gay, and he knew from the sound of it that she was desperately in earnest, was waiting anxiously, almost nervously, for his answer.

Eustace got clear of the car and stood up facing her. He could not let this attack pass without reply. With a flushed face he said: "I can really offer no solution of the mystery. I've been back such a short time and I haven't discussed the matter. But Vicky would tell you that the Powers are both capricious and obdurate. We humor them as far as we can. Shall we leave it at that?"

Despite his mocking words, uttered with a smile, she discerned a touch of bitterness, a hint of revolt and resentment. There was a grim look about his dark eyes.

Nella made a slight, expressive grimace.

"Most people have been terribly kind to us since we came to live here. Mother and Mrs. Dyrham at Moth Hill Manor are old school friends—it was on her account that we took the cottage—she wrote and told us it was going. And Mr.

Soames is a very decent landlord, and I don't think he finds us such very bad tenants. I'm only telling you all this to show you that there really isn't anything against us except that we're rather hard up. I'm sure, too, that Vicky—is that really her name?—it sounds quite regal—Vicky and I would get on like a house on fire. I can always tell at once if I'm going to like people or not, can't you? And we're hardly more than a mile apart—we could meet often. I simply haven't anyone of my own age. Couldn't *you* manage it somehow, Mr. Wingrave?"

She stood there, slim, appealing, very charming in her earnestness.

"I only wish I could," said Eustace. "For my own sake sake as well as for Vicky's," he added, daringly.

"Why, that's quite a nice compliment!" laughed Miss Tresham.

"It's a perfectly sincere one, anyhow."

"You might tell your Powers, then, that you'd met me and would like to continue the acquaintance. Are they so very formidable?"

"Very. About some things."

"And I'm one of the things?" Again he discerned that note of almost tremulous anxiety and appeal.

"Well, I suppose you must be, though I can't imagine why." He stood there now, facing her, his hands in his pockets. He wished that she hadn't asked him that question, but since she had, rather with the air of one who wanted at any rate to know the worst, he felt compelled to give a perfectly frank reply. "I only wish you weren't," he added, for he noticed that she had winced slightly just as if she had been hurt.

"I think I'm afraid of your—Powers," she admitted.

"We speak of them in the plural," said Eustace, "but we really only mean my father. My mother always seems to do exactly what he wishes and she never lets on whether she approves or not. I believe I'm telling you something now about our family life, but I feel you ought to know just how we stand."

"Do you know what I think it is?" she pursued, coming a step nearer.

Eustace lowered his eyes before what seemed to him a blinding glance. He felt himself yielding to the absolute enchantment of her; it was like a magic spell, irresistible, and diminishing even one's wish to resist.

"I really can't imagine."

"I think it must be on our account of our religion," she said; "we're Catholics, you know, Mother and I. And Catholics do still sometimes have to put up with that kind of thing. Snubs, you know. Pin-pricks. I know it's ridiculous to mind, but they do hurt sometimes. We came here because we wanted a cheap quiet place to live in, not too far from a church. And there's one at Llyn. Of course it's very dull down here, but the air suits Mother—that's one blessing. I never realized quite how dull it would be in the country without any near neighbors of one's own age. But Mrs. Dyrham gave me this two-seater and had me taught to drive it, so it isn't quite so bad now."

He hardly heard what she was saying. His mind was so full of those words: "We're Catholics, you know, Mother and I. . . ."

His eyes as they met hers were full of troubled, puzzled inquiry.

"Catholics!" he repeated, almost as if the word held a strange sound. "But I knew you were. Vicky told me. At least she said she thought so."

They had never known any Catholics; until he joined the army he had never met a single one. Was it part of his father's narrow discipline to keep his children from all contact with other forms of religion? Almost involuntarily he put his hand up to his throat and felt for the little silver crucifix that was concealed there beneath his shirt. The crucifix that his mother had once so eagerly, so impulsively kissed. That little action seemed to remove her utterly from the charge of intolerance and bigotry. It wasn't her doing, and it comforted him now to assure himself of this fact.

"Are they so very intolerant?" Nella asked.

"I don't think my mother is. I'm sure, in fact, she isn't. About my father it's more difficult to say. We've never discussed the subject."

"But I mean—are they very keen about the Church of England?"

He shook his head.

"I shouldn't say so. My father goes to church on Sundays, and he makes a point of our going with him when we're at home."

"But if it isn't our religion, what can it be?" she asked. "Lady Pendre has never set eyes on us, as far as I know. Certainly never on Mother, because she hardly ever goes beyond the garden. And even if she had seen her she couldn't help loving her. She's so beautiful and dear." Her face was all softened with a very genuine enthusiasm. "She has never been a Power," she went on; "she couldn't be one if she tried. She's more like my sister—we tell each other everything—she'll be just as amused as I am at our meeting like this!"

2

Although the car had long since been set to rights, and somewhere beyond the curve in the road Mrs. Welby was still tramping up and down on the frozen path, the two made no effort to resume their respective journeys. They continued to stand there talking, face to face and quite close to each other, aware perhaps that this their first interview might prove to be their last, and that therefore it behooved them to make the most of those precious minutes.

Nella indeed seemed to be perfectly oblivious of the passing of time; she couldn't have said if she had been there an hour, two hours, or even three. She was becoming desperately interested in this young Wingrave who was making it quite easy for her to discuss possible solutions to the problem that was so teasing her. When she had seen him on Moth Hill, she had thought him small and rather plain; it was Vicky who had chiefly attracted her. She desperately wanted to comfort Vicky, who looked such a forlorn unhappy little creature! But now she seemed to be learning every moment how charming Eustace was. She didn't think him plain any more—he had such wonderful eyes beneath that poet's brow.

Eustace himself, completely under the spell of her beauty, her girlish chatter, now gay, now serious, asked nothing better of the fates than a continuance of present benefits. He wanted to tell her that it simply couldn't end here—they must meet often, often—in defiance of the Powers and their arbitrary decisions. That he couldn't let her go completely out of his life, like the swift passing of some wonderful vision.

But a dull sense of loyalty held him back, so that he never voiced one of those phrases. If he couldn't do quite all his father expected of him, he would at least be careful to submit to his will in little things. Little things! . . . His mind caught at the words, dismissing them with mocking derision. And he learned then, unwillingly, reluctantly, but very surely, that Nella Treshham wasn't a little thing. She was very important indeed, and she had already bound him so fast in the web of her own enchanting personality that he felt he could never again escape.

A Catholic? He thought suddenly and perhaps irrelevantly of the shadow that brooded over Pendre. A shadow in whose intangible darkness they all lived and moved, and from which it was beginning to seem they could never release themselves. And this girl belonged to a free and beautiful world that lay outside that shadow. A world perhaps where even shadows had their meaning and purpose. . . .

But he felt the presence of a barrier between himself and Nella; it chilled him as he realized it. His face had grown wistful now, almost suffering.

"Vicky thought it might be because you were Catholics," he said, at last. "I'm in utter ignorance—absolutely in the dark. You must believe that, and that I'd alter things if I could."

"You couldn't try?" she asked eagerly.

"I'm afraid it would be no use, but I'll do my best—I can promise you that at any rate. And Vicky wants to be friends with you—she feels just as you do about it. You'd be awfully good for Vicky, you'd cheer her up. She's inclined to be morbid and despondent . . ."

It was convenient to use Vicky as a peg for his own emotions and wishes. Emboldened, he stretched out his hand and took hers, holding it thus for a brief moment. In doing so he had either drawn her a little closer to him or she had moved nearer of her own accord. He felt that she trembled. It was very cold, and the hand that rested in his felt like a little lump of ice. He dropped it, but his eyes were fixed upon her face. And it seemed to him in that moment that their two souls had made a pitiful desperate endeavor to approach each other, as souls sometimes will in an effort to mitigate their forlorn and irremediable and inescapable loneliness.

They looked into each other's eyes without speaking, and Eustace felt he had stepped out of the shadow and was standing face to face with Nella in a blinding searching light. . . .

The moment passed. Now they were only two young and muddy and rather disheveled figures standing at the side of a frozen road along which a fierce polar wind had begun to sweep with breath of ice. Mrs. Welby's firm regular footsteps could be heard approaching, beating rhythmically upon that iron pathway. In the absence of all other sounds they seemed almost like the strokes of a hammer. They belonged to fate, to destiny.

"Finished your job, Mr. Wingrave?" she said, as she came up to them. Her smile was pleasant and friendly. But even she felt that she had overstepped the limits of prudence in leaving them together for so long.

"Oh, it was done ages ago," remarked Nella, cheerfully. "We've been talking."

When Eustace Wingrave had held her hand in his for an appreciable moment, his touch had reassured her as to the future. They were "friends," and surely it wouldn't be easy for him to go away and never see her again.

As for Eustace, he thought that he should always be able to visualize her with the white frozen wintry sky above her, the powdered green and white fields stretching to right and left, the brown hedges sheltering them, the gulls wheeling in the air high over their heads, and in the distance the deep, sustained and rhythmic surging of the sea.

Mrs. Welby glanced from one to the other. If she had been struck with their lack of consideration for herself, she had far too much sympathy with young people to feel at all resentful about it. Besides, there was something about this young Wingrave that attracted her. His pleasant frank manner held a charm to which she could not be indifferent. But Eustace Wingrave . . . and Nella! She put the thought from her as absurd and even a little foolish. Catholic girls, especially if penniless, as indeed they generally were, couldn't expect to marry the eldest or only sons of rich people belonging to another faith. Family tradition on both sides precluded the possibility of such an alliance. And she had heard the usual gossip—that Lord Pendre, a stern harsh father, was inclined to be especially hard on his only surviving son.

"Well, then I think we ought to be going," she said, in her cheerful good-tempered way that seemed to set their feet once more on the good solid earth, far removed from fantastic, romantic happenings. "But perhaps we shall see you sometimes?" She turned to Eustace, with a smile.

"Oh, I hope so—I hope we shall meet often—" He stumbled over the words, vaguely comforted by her implicit support. She was evidently a very easy-going duenna.

"You'll nearly always find us in about tea-time," she further informed him.

He flushed a little. "Thanks very much. I'll try to look in."

Conflicting loyalties again agitated him, at the same time he wasn't going to close a door that had so suddenly, so wonderfully, so unexpectedly opened to him, giving him a glimpse of a paradise that was beyond all his imagining.

And always there was the hope that he might persuade his mother to relent. The episode couldn't possibly begin and end with this one fortuitous meeting. There must surely be a sequel. A sequel especially to that moment when they had stood there with their hands clasped, their eyes meeting and saying eloquently all those things to which their lips must as yet perforce remain dumb.

Mrs. Welby moved toward the car and took her seat therein. Nella Tresham followed, gripping the wheel. Eustace shook hands with both of them, and as they drove away he raised his hat and shouted: "Good-bye!" They were soon out of sight, disappearing round the bend, traveling swiftly up the long road that climbed Moth Hill. Nella just waved her hand before she vanished. . .

He got into his car and drove rapidly along the lower road, within sight and sound of the sea, that led to Pendre. He passed through the cheerful modern little streets of Llyn, with its shops, its cinema halls, its tea-rooms and restaurants. Now he could see the brown and leafless woods of Pendre making a dark blot against the sky. They were only lightly powdered with snow, at this distance it looked like the fragile whiteness of fruit-blossom.

Eustace was in a subdued, sober mood. The future looked unusually difficult, now that it held the added problem of Nella. But he remembered with satisfaction Mrs. Welby's kindly commonplace words: "You'll nearly always find us in about tea-time." It constituted an invitation, showing him at least that if he did present himself he would be welcome.

He must ask his mother. Perhaps she would be able to throw some light on his father's extraordinary objection to these charming people. And in any case he couldn't see himself not going to Glen Cottage—not availing himself of that permission to see Nella again.

3

Eustace found his mother alone in the library. It was a beautiful room—one of the most beautiful perhaps at Pendre. They had found it like that when they bought the place, and they had not changed anything. It was full of dark carved paneling, elaborate, ornate, and the bookcases were carved, too. The electric light, carefully hidden, made a subdued radiance in the room. Flowers contributed almost the only note of color except for the gleam of gold from the books.

"Have you had tea?" she asked. "You've been gone so long."

"No—I should like some, please."

He leaned back in a big chair. His dark head was outlined against the mellowed gold of an old Chinese screen.

She gave him some tea.

"Where's Vicky?" he asked.

"Still upstairs. Her cold's heavy."

"And Dad?"

"Playing golf at Llyn with Mr. Soames. He must have gone back to Moth Hill to tea, or he'd have been in by now."

She glanced at him as she spoke. He was looking singularly alive this evening; his eyes were very brilliant under their penthouse brows. His mouth looked ready to break into a smile; it was curving a little downward at the corners just as it did when he was going to laugh.

She felt vaguely uneasy about him. He was such a stranger to her . . . and was growing so dear. His presence reacted upon her in an indescribable way, and she found by close self-examination that her love was gradually becoming concentrated upon him, her only surviving son. It was strange to realize that though Philip had been the darling of her heart, the favorite *par excellence* of all her children, the one to whom she had given a love far surpassing that which she had been able to offer to the others, he had never been so close to her as Eustace had seemed since his return. Perhaps that old absorbing love had blinded her in some sense to the less showy and brilliant but very profound qualities possessed by this younger son. Philip's death, which had torn her heart in two, had yet enabled her to see Eustace more clearly. Something of her love, so cruelly wounded, had stirred to new life and transferred itself almost unconsciously to him.

Eustace was dearer to her than he had ever been. She understood him better. She saw points of resemblance between his mentality and her own. Her maternal feelings asserted themselves almost fiercely, springing up like a pure passionate flame.

And she wanted ardently to help him in that spiritual quest. How could she stand by, indifferent, supine, while he struggled blindly? Oh, if she could only designate by one tiny gesture the path that would lead him to the sure solution of his problem! What if in blindness and ignorance that were no fault of his, he should miss it altogether—should pass it by unmindful? . . .

She wanted to make up to him for those years in which Philip had been her first thought. Had he ever felt the need of her love, knowing that it was all poured out lavishly upon his brother? Perhaps it was too late now to redeem those years. Perhaps he didn't want to be any nearer to her, or to inherit anything that had been Philip's. But, then, she told herself he mustn't hold aloof; he must play his part in the changed order of things, and learn to give her what she had never hitherto asked of him.

Her heart went out rather wistfully to him then, as he sat there, so unconscious of all that was passing in her mind. Indeed his own thoughts were so desperately concentrated upon another woman that perhaps nothing was further from them than the mother who sat there waiting for him to speak. She was aware then of his unconsciousness, and the knowledge made her react quickly; she had a sickening misgiving that she had come too late, that her efforts and overtures would prove in vain.

He was the most reserved and reticent of all her four children. Even as a little boy he had given no clue as to what was passing in his mind. She saw him now, difficult, complex, removed from her, too, by the urgency of his new spiritual quest.

"Wasn't it very cold?" she asked.

"Yes . . . no . . . the snow's deep in places. But I was held up for more than half an hour. I met Miss Tresham and her friend, Mrs. Welby. Their car had broken down. I had to help them."

He made the confession simply, but his eyes never lost their shining look.

"Miss Tresham!" she repeated, astonished. Then in a more normal frigid tone: "How awkward for you, Eustie. You know we haven't called. Your father didn't wish it."

"Yes, so Vicky told me. But why on earth should he want to cold-shoulder them? Strangers to the place—and badly off. What's the matter with them? Is there anything wrong? Or is it just one of Dad's caprices?"

He pelted forth the questions with a new roughness of manner, abrupt and rather defiant.

"There isn't anything wrong—you mustn't think that," she assured him eagerly. "Mrs. Dyrham's known them a long time; she says they are charming, and that the mother and daughter are extremely devoted to each other. But I can't call on every new person that comes to the place. And I was in mourning for Phip when they first came—I wasn't going anywhere."

She was evading the issue. But Eustace refused to be put off; for him this was a serious matter, and one that must be dealt with—if dealt with at all—fundamentally.

"Is it because they're Catholics?" he asked sternly. "I know it sounds ridiculous to ask such a question in these days, but I simply can't think of any other reason."

"That may, of course, have had something to do with your father's wish that I shouldn't call."

"I couldn't have believed it possible! What on earth can Dad have against the Catholic religion?"

His stormy, burning eyes gazed remorselessly upon her, as if demanding an adequate explanation. His white angry face had lost its habitual expression of scornful calm.

"He can't possibly be in love with this girl—he's only seen her once—" thought Lady Pendre. "I've heard she's pretty. What can she have said to him?"

That the subject should evidently have been discussed by them, openly and without reserve, displeased her a little. It was so unlike Eustace to criticize his home-happenings to strangers. But of course it must have been entirely Miss

Tresham's fault that he had done so. She must have availed herself of this unique opportunity to question him as to the reason for his parents' refusal to know herself or her mother.

"She's met with that kind of thing before—but somehow she didn't expect it from us!" he continued angrily.

She retained her calm, although his look and words disturbed her. Aloud she only said:

"I really think if you wish to know any more you must ask your father. He may tell you his reasons. But he won't like to think you have talked it over with Miss Tresham." Her voice held a faint reproof, but all the time she was speaking she knew that she was deliberately increasing the distance between them. Only a few minutes ago she had believed that she would have given Eustace anything and everything that was, humanly speaking, possible. Why was it that he had perversely chosen just the one thing she couldn't give him?

"I've always liked the Catholics I've met," he went on. "They have a standard—it's a pretty high one—and when they don't live up to it they know exactly where they've failed. It's all cut and dried."

His newly-aroused interest in religion created its own barrier. If he would only understand that this was the one plane where they must never even try to meet! . . .

She knew he would never ask his father for any explanation; it had been quite safe to suggest this course to him. Her two younger children feared their father, and they had little love for him. Even now the ancient fear had left a kind of constraint in Eustace' case; he never questioned any of Lord Pendre's arbitrary decisions to his face, but writhed beneath them in rebellious silence. When he and Vicky had been young they had spent their time in a more or less successful endeavor to avoid his notice. There was that fierce and violent temper to be reckoned with. But in private they criticized him freely, and cherished a strong contempt for his lack of self-control, his wild undisciplined fiery nature. They regarded his ebullitions of anger as "bad form," and were privately a little ashamed of them. And in response Eustace had schooled himself to offer a cold, controlled, slightly caustic attitude, not unmixed with scorn.

But with their mother things were very different. No lack of control there—that icy imperturbable calm of hers encased her like an invulnerable armor. It made her a beautiful enigma to her children. But she was intensely loyal to her husband. She never seemed to question his decisions and commands. They had often wondered at her swift effortless submission. Perhaps she felt that she owed him too much in the shape of material things. Whatever his faults to his children might be, he was a devoted generous husband; he adored his wife with a possessive, jealous worship. Yet even to her his will seemed to be law. Whether she submitted willingly because her judgment and sympathy were at one with his own, her children could hazard no guess. It might be that her acquiescence was the natural reaction of the weaker nature in contact with the stronger and more imperious personality. But in this as in all other things concerning her, the children could come to no definite conclusion; they were at every turn baffled and defeated.

"I suppose there isn't anything against my going to Glen Cottage?" Eustace inquired at last. "Or would he be afraid of my being contaminated?"

She knew now by his persistence that his desire to know the Treshams, to be on friendly terms with them, was no passing whim. He was serious and obstinate.

"I really think you'd better not follow up the acquaintance, unless it's so very important," she answered. "It would be putting us into rather an equivocal position."

She seemed to associate herself implicitly yet definitely with Lord Pendre's decision in the matter. But her hands moved nervously. And again she was aware of something accusing, almost condemnatory, in that dark straight gaze of Eustace.

"I'm afraid that I can't promise not to go," he said, after a slight pause during which the conflict of loyalties made itself felt more sharply and painfully than ever in his heart. It seemed to him that he must perforce distress one or other of these women. He must choose. And the choice wasn't easy;

it was highly complex. When he looked at his mother it even seemed to hold a peculiar bitterness.

Of course she was wholly wrong to yield thus indolently to his father's caprice about a matter wherein no principle could possibly be involved. But he could not make her see this. She had the habit of submission, and there was nothing in the least derogatory about her attitude, she seemed always to acquiesce rather than to yield. She wasn't simply a door-mat woman, like James Lee's Wife. Perhaps she did indeed love this harsh hard man whom so few people loved. Perhaps she owed him more than they knew. Perhaps there existed between them a fundamental sympathy which obviated any clash of wills. But the more Eustace considered her attitude toward his father, the more he drew back baffled.

"I liked Miss Tresham," he admitted. "And that nice woman who goes about with her—Mrs. Welby."

Lady Pendre rose to her feet. Mechanically Eustace followed her example.

"Eustace . . ."

Something in her tone, something unusually emotional, startled him.

"Yes, Mother?"

"For my sake, dear." Her lips could scarcely frame the words. "I don't often ask anything of you, do I? But I do ask this, darling—for every reason in the world!"

Her eyes seemed to implore him not to invite her to specify those reasons. She was not prepared to state them explicitly. She was only begging him to accept her request blindly.

4

This time the silence was longer. Eustace felt the presence of something at once sinister and intangible as he had never before felt it. With its deep mysterious webs of darkness it seemed to blot out his mother's figure, her beautiful distressed imploring face. And then the consciousness of it stung him into speech. He had the old longing to bring it out into the light of day and fight it, this lurking secret enemy that ever eluded him. . . .

"It's the shadow!" he exclaimed, with a sense of struggling against something at once unwholesome and evil, of being enmeshed too in an invisible web.

Then he stopped abruptly, ashamed now of having revealed the reason of his emotional restlessness. Both he and his mother were far away now from the contemplation of Mrs. Tresham and her daughter. This thing scarcely touched them. Or if it did it was in some way unknown to him, although perhaps not unknown to her.

"The shadow? . . ." she repeated. Beneath her surface bewilderment she was subconsciously aware of his meaning. He was making discoveries. He had come back to Pendre after that long eventful absence, with a fresh and penetrating vision, stimulated by contact with new worlds, and eager to sweep out dark corners as if with a powerful searchlight.

Her heart sickened at the thought. The discovery that there was something hidden and secret at Pendre would only stimulate his eagerness to unravel the mystery.

"What do you mean, Eustie darling?" There was a faint tremor in her voice.

"The shadow that's over us all—over this house!" he replied, with a kind of sullen violence. "We both feel it, you know—Vicky and I! And I believe that latterly Phip felt it too."

"Oh, what do you mean, Eustie? What *sort* of shadow? I don't understand." She looked piteously at him.

But her words did not prevent him from seeing that her blindness, her lack of comprehension, were not authentic; they were wilful, deliberate, unconvincing. She *knew* . . .

He stood with folded hands, his face as pale as her own. "Vicky thinks it's because one of us must have offended God!"

"Oh! . . ."

The sound escaped her as if it had been wrung from someone under torture. She shrank away from that accusing look in his deep burning eyes. His words, with all their horror, explicit and suggested, echoed tumultuously in her brain. He had the aspect, she thought, of a young prophet.

"The question is which one of us has done it?" he continued, gazing at her pitilessly, as if determined to win the truth from her. He was fighting the shadow. Either he must destroy it utterly or he must beat it back into the region of shadows so that it should no longer emerge to darken the very sunshine of Pendre. He wanted to come to grips with it—this nameless thing which he felt but could not see, and that was subtly poisoning the very air they breathed.

Behind that relentless boyish arraignment Lady Pendre could discern an almost piteous appeal for the help that she alone could give.

"Eustie—don't talk like that—you shouldn't encourage Vicky—she's always been morbidly imaginative. Don't listen to her—you have too much sense—you mustn't let her frighten you."

"I'm not frightened," he said with a touch of scorn. "But I want to find out exactly what it is. I want to face it—to fight it—to expiate, if I can, any wrong that's been done!"

Any wrong that's been done. . . .

He came a step nearer.

"Can't you tell me, Mother? Can't you trust me?"

His voice was very gentle now, almost persuasive; the anger had gone out of his eyes, leaving them dull and somber.

She fought desperately against that growing desire to help him. But she thought: "If I told him I should lose his love." That was why she could not even indicate the source and fount of that shadow.

"Don't, don't let Vicky talk so wildly to you. It's bad for her. Your father has always tried to correct that tendency to exaggeration in her."

"It wasn't Vicky. We both felt it. I was glad that she spoke of it to me. It was getting on her nerves."

"Don't encourage her." The words came faintly, almost as if the protracted scene were beginning to exhaust her.

Eustace stepped up to her fearlessly and grasped her hands in his own.

"Won't you tell me, Mother? Won't you even say that we're wrong?—that there isn't any shadow?"

She took her hands away with a quick impulsive movement. Then she moved slowly toward the door without speaking. She kept her eyes averted. Her face was very pale but perfectly composed, it wore its usual expression of enigmatic calm. If she carried any sinister secret in her heart, her face showed no sign of it.

She would neither affirm nor deny. She gave him no help; she wrapped herself in that chilly mantle of isolation and reticence. But it seemed to him that in going away like that, tacitly refusing to listen to his passionate petition, she had deliberately left him alone with the shadow. . . .

5

He went back to his old seat by the fire, bitterly conscious of defeat. He had unburdened his heart to his mother—he had shown her the fears that were tormenting it, had given her every opportunity of allaying them—and all to no purpose. His cruel but necessary frankness had only elicited from her that one half-strangled little cry of pain. Her silence had been to him terrible. The shadow was still there, it seemed to envelop him with its impenetrable darkness.

"Why, Eustace, are you alone? Where's your mother?"

Eustace had been wholly unaware of the passing of time. He could not have said if one hour or two had elapsed since his mother had gone out of the room, leaving him alone. He had felt too stunned, too much absorbed by his own crowding thoughts, to notice. Now his father's voice, harsh and irritable, broke in upon him like a rude interruption.

He looked up, his young face curiously haggard.

"I don't know. She went away."

He rose and went toward the door. He felt that he could not bear his father's presence then. But the impatient autocratic voice arrested him before he reached the door.

"What's the matter? Has anything happened?"

"No. Nothing, Dad. I came in rather late for tea—we had a talk—then she went away. . . ."

He made his escape, mounting the stairs very rapidly to his own room.

Lord Pendre looked at the retreating figure of his son. Surly, ill-conditioned cub! He wondered what was in the fellow's mind. He had such a queer look about the eyes. Ten to one he'd been worrying his mother about some trivial thing. Giselda was far too indulgent with her children. They'd never had any trouble with the other two. But Eustace and Vicky! . . . He went to the bell and pressed it twice impatiently.

"Bring some fresh tea," he said to the footman who appeared and immediately vanished on receiving the order.

When the tea came Lord Pendre drank two cups of it hastily, but he ate nothing. His thoughts were full of Eustace. Why on earth did he avoid him like this, going out of the room almost as soon as he himself came into it? Barbara had warned him that Eustace had some queer Bolshevist notions in his head—well, he'd soon have to get rid of them, then! There was no money in that kind of thing, and if Eustace wanted money he must work for it, and work hard, too, although he was a rich man's only son.

Having finished his tea, he went upstairs in search of his wife. It was so unlike her not to wait downstairs in the library or green drawing-room until his return, especially when she knew that he must have had a long and tiring afternoon on the links with Soames.

His big squarish face was slightly reddened from contact with that icy wind which seemed to have blown across leagues of snow. His heavy eyelids were reddened, too. But he looked immensely strong and powerful, and capable of affronting the severest weather. Yet he was obliged to acknowledge that the afternoon had been far from pleasant. There had been a good deal of snow on the links; he had lost several balls, and he had even suggested to Soames that they should relinquish their game. But Soames had seemed oddly set on it, and he was conscious of a wish to please him or at least not to offend him unnecessarily. Judging from the results, too, he was able to look back upon the apparently inauspicious expedition with feelings of satisfaction. Their return journey, for instance, in Soames' luxurious closed car, had compensated for a good deal. Certain things had been said during that drive back to Pendre through the chilly wintry twilight, that had been excessively agreeable to his ears.

Naturally he wished to communicate something of all this to his wife, and her unusual absence from the library that evening had annoyed him for more reasons than one. In particular, he had wished to tell her about that important, gratifying conversation he had had with Soames.

Apart from this, there had been something in Eustace' haggard troubled aspect that had aroused both anger and misgivings within him. He always suspected his two younger children of that obscure offense he was wont to define as "worrying their mother."

Eustace had looked distinctly upset. He had positively fled from the room as if he couldn't bear to be questioned.

Lord Pendre went up to his wife's study, which was next to her bedroom, on the first floor. It was a long and rather narrow room, looking across the Pendre woods to the blue line of the Irish Sea beyond. She had chosen it, when they first came to Pendre, on account of its beautiful view. In material things her husband never refused her anything. He was lavishly generous toward her. And generosity was not perhaps one of his chief characteristics.

When he came in, she looked up quickly and saw that his dark swart face was slightly perturbed. The forehead beneath the thick greying hair was contracted in a deep frown.

Lady Pendre was lying on a couch near the fire. Close by these was a small polished table, on which stood an electric lamp with rose-colored shade, and some books. She held a book in her hand, too, but she was not reading. There was something, indeed, in her prone indolent attitude that suggested exhaustion.

"Giselda!" he said.

She moved her head slightly so that the rosy light fell upon her face, imbuing it with a certain fictitious warmth and glow.

"Yes, Hugo?"

"What is the matter? What are you doing up here?"

"I was tired."

He was standing over her, and she saw the steely glint in his ruthless black eyes. He wasn't satisfied with her simple explanation. Perhaps he scented disturbance of some kind. He meant to get at the truth. Still, there were certain things she didn't mean to tell him. She was determined, for instance, not to mention what Eustace had said about the shadow. . . .

She saw for the first time a certain resemblance between Eustace and his father. They were both harsh, ruthless in their methods. The only difference was that she wasn't bound to satisfy Eustace' curiosity as she was that of his father; she could baffle him with evasive replies. He might chafe against them, but always, always, she could leave him in the dark and dissatisfied.

But Lord Pendre had the faculty, known to none other, of eliciting speech from his wife. She did not baffle him, and indeed there was no need to do so. They had no dark secrets from each other. The shadow in which they dwelt held no mysterious terrors for them; they were aware of both its cause and its nature. . . .

"Has Eustace been worrying you?" he demanded.

The line of his lips beneath the black hair of moustache and beard was a little cruel.

"No . . . no . . ." she answered.

Perfectly frank with him about herself, she did on occasion assiduously hide from him such things concerning her children as she knew would probably annoy him. A protective, maternal instinct dictated these innocent subterfuges which, it must be admitted, rarely deceived him. . . .

She struggled to her feet. The book dropped to the floor. Lord Pendre picked it up, replacing it on the table.

"Don't make a fuss please, Hugo. My head aches—I want to be alone. You mustn't think that Eustace—"

He pulled her toward him and then, gently leading her to the sofa, made her sit down by his side. He was no longer angry or impatient. He saw that something had distressed her; he must discover the reason.

As she sat there with the light from lamp and fire making a kind of rosy radiance upon her face and dress, he was struck afresh by her beauty. So wonderful—so unspoiled. She seemed to him more lovely than she had ever been. She had that look of race which is in itself a thing of great beauty. Her aspect was still almost girlish, but there was an expression in her face that was not girlish. The eyes told of experience and suffering; the mouth, of reticence during that suffering.

"I saw Eustace when I came in—he was sitting in the library, doing nothing, as usual. He looked upset—his face was quite queer. I suppose you've had a scene, and that as usual you're trying to shield him! But, dear Giselda, you'd much better tell me about it. I can't and won't have the children worrying you."

He drew her a little closer; his hand held one of hers, firmly, possessively.

"Oh, Hugo—why do you want to know? Sons say things to their mothers they wouldn't dream of telling their fathers!"

"Don't try to put me off. I really intend to know. I'm not going to have him hanging about here idle much longer, and so I shall tell him!"

His voice, though still suave, had an iron sound that did not escape her. She feared him when he spoke like that. And, after all, had he not a father's right to know what his children thought and felt?

"He's restless here," she said. "The sooner he goes away the better. He needs a holiday. And then he's been used lately to more liberty than you choose to give him."

"Liberty! As if I ever interfered! What on earth do you mean?"

She paused a moment and then said cautiously:

"He met Miss Tresham to-day on his way home. Her car had broken down—he went to the rescue."

Relief was visible in his face.

"I don't see any harm in that, though of course it was a little awkward for him, in the circumstances."

"Well, it began about that. He wanted to know why we hadn't called. I think he was taken with the girl." She paused, and now she let her eyes rest upon his face with an unafraid, unembarrassed gaze. "If you don't want him to know her, perhaps you'd better arrange for him to go away for a little. To travel and amuse himself for a few months, while he makes up his mind exactly what he wants to do. He's had a very hard three years, you know."

Her low clear voice was not without its effect upon him.

"I am certainly not going to allow him to visit the Treshams," said Lord Pendre imperturbably. "You must make that quite clear to him. Vicky is very easily influenced, and Soames tells me Miss Tresham has great charm."

"But, Hugo—you must see that to forbid anything of the kind is to curtail his liberty at once. And we can't tell him, can we?—that a question of principle is involved." Her voice was now faintly ironic.

"While he's under my roof he must jolly well do as I wish!" She got a hint now of rising temper. "I hope you didn't encourage him?"

"I simply told him that you didn't want to know them—that you'd asked me not to call."

"I'd better speak to him myself," said Lord Pendre. "He'd a queer sullen look on his face just now. I can't think what's the matter with the fellow. Phip was never like that. But I'm not going to stand any nonsense—I've still got the whip-hand of him!" His voice rose in angry, marked crescendo. "He's penniless except for what I choose to give him!"

"Yes, but other people don't treat their sons like that. They give them liberty, yes, and money, relying on them to use both wisely and prudently. Eustace is twenty-two—you ought to trust him more."

"Trust him? When he's just the sort of young fool to take up with people like the Treshams, or become a Bolshevist, or join some freak religion! Giselda, you know it as well as I do. We've always been anxious about Eustace, never knowing how he'd turn out. If he leaves here I shall only give him just enough to live upon. He must work—it'll teach him to value the job I can offer him. The job Phip ought to have had!"

"Do as you think best. I'm sure he doesn't expect you to give him any money. Only let him go!" She spoke pleadingly. "He isn't happy here—he doesn't want anything we can give him."

"What does the blighter want, then?" inquired Lord Pendre, witheringly.

"Something I can't give him." She glanced at him now significantly. "Hugo—it isn't any use—we can't shirk the issue. All our trouble with our children can be traced back to the same source. I don't believe we should have escaped it ultimately with Phip if he had lived. And they're beginning to search for a clue. Neither Eustace nor Vicky is satisfied."

"In what way?" he asked. Something of her uneasiness communicated itself to him. "In what way?" he repeated.

"They're beginning—at least Eustie is—to think about religion. To feel the need of it."

"Well, then why don't you tell him? He's old enough to know. Old enough to see the wisdom—"

But she was thinking of the little crucifix that lay hidden beneath her son's shirt.

"You don't know him. If I were to tell him now, do you think he would approve? He would condemn me."

Lord Pendre was silent. What had Eustace been saying to his mother to enable her to speak with such certainty?

"Do you mean to tell me that this girl's been getting hold of him, Giselda?" he demanded.

"Not yet. He's only spoken to her once, as far as I know. But he is ripe for anything of the kind. He has it in his blood. That kind of spiritual heredity is very strong. And on my mother's side it had been unbroken through so many generations. It's almost bound to come out in one or other of them."

"Nonsense—they know nothing! I've taken jolly good care of that. And you've kept your word, I know—I needn't ask you."

"Yes, I have kept my word."

"It's only a phase with Eustace—it'll pass off. I believe a great many young men became very religious in the trenches."

"Well, if it happens you mustn't blame me," she said.

He gave her a long close look.

"You could give Eustace a hint about my feelings on the subject. He must remember his position now. It is the one thing I should never tolerate either in my house or in the firm. And about Miss Tresham—"

"Yes, Hugo?"

"If I find he's been going there I'll speak to him myself."

CHAPTER VII

Arranging a Marriage

1

WHEN Lord Pendre went out of the room, he suddenly remembered that he had never mentioned to his wife the substance of the important conversation he had had that afternoon with Ernest Soames. They had both been thinking and speaking so much of Eustace that the subject of Vicky had taken a minor place. This was odd because his mind had been rather full of it when he first came in.

However, there was no special hurry, since Ernest was leaving Moth Hill Park early on the following morning to spend a few days in London. Nothing could be settled until he came back, and he had promised to dine with them on the following Monday evening. Monday—there would be plenty of time to discuss the matter thoroughly before then.

At dinner that night Lord Pendre took an unusual amount of notice of Vicky. He talked to her in a manner that was meant to be agreeable, but Vicky, who was ignorant of the reason, was secretly terrified. She had been somewhat in disgrace since the meeting with Martin and the departure of Miss Brigstocke.

At one moment she had a wild hope that her father meant to relent and give his consent to her marriage with Martin. The thought cheered her. She began to talk and laugh, then answering her father fearlessly. Perhaps she owed this change of mood to some pleading of her mother's.

When she was vivacious she was very pretty, and Lord Pendre noted with approval how greatly she had improved in looks of late. Really she was hardly less lovely than

Barbara, and she had more expression than her sister; her very immaturity held charm. To some men it might perhaps possess even more charm than Barbara's somewhat sophisticated loveliness.

He felt unusually pleased with his daughter. With Vicky married and Eustace away, its ancient peace would surely descend upon Pendre. Pamela would remain, of course. He wondered if Eustace had ever thought of Pamela. Anyhow he wasn't going to have him running after strange gods.

Miss Tresham indeed! He had seen the girl once or twice in the streets of Llyn. Very showy-looking and conspicuous with that bright hair and brilliant complexion, but not at all the kind of wife for Eustace. No family, and living in such a poor way with her mother and that elderly companion. He had heard they did all the housework themselves. Very praiseworthy, no doubt, and many well-born people had been driven to those extremes by the brutal changes brought about by the War, but that was not the kind of milieu whence Lord Pendre's only son must take his wife.

And, above all, Eustace must never marry a Catholic. That was the most flagrant of Miss Tresham's disabilities. All the rest counted for nothing. Inquiring about religion, was he? Well, a few strenuous months spent in the work of the firm would soon drive that nonsense out of his head. He must speak to Eustace, and tell him that he couldn't go on loafing at Pendre forever. He was getting demoralized.

"Did you have good games, Fa?" Pamela asked suddenly.

"Well, I didn't exactly enjoy them—there was too much snow and a biting wind. Ernest was in very good form, though. He beat me each time."

"Mr. Soames hasn't been near us lately," said Pamela.

"Well, he's going to dine here on Monday," said Lord Pendre, with a gleam of triumph in his black eyes. He glanced round the dinner table and let his gaze rest for a moment upon Vicky. Such an odd troublesome child. But this marriage would be the making of her. After that precocious escapade with Martin Sedgwick, it was high time to settle her future.

Ernest Soames was one of the few men in the neighborhood with whom Lord Pendre was on friendly, even intimate terms. They had a number of tastes in common. They played golf together, discussed and deplored the growing discontent among their tenants and the exorbitant demands of their laborers, sat side by side on the Bench, distributing fines and punishments among those luckless imprudent ones who fell into the hands of the law, and often lunched or dined at each other's houses. Lately Ernest had come over to Pendre with greater frequency, at least until the time of Eustace' return, when his visits abruptly ceased. Sometimes Lady Pendre believed that Pamela was the attraction. On the whole, she considered that his chances of success were good. Pamela would be settled close to Pendre for the rest of her life; the two estates adjoined; the owners were on friendly terms. Ernest was a good sort, a noted sportsman and very keen about games; he was over forty years old and quite well off.

Whether Lord Pendre suspected that his wife would not see eye to eye with him in the matter, it would have been difficult to say, but for some reason or other he hesitated to approach her on the subject. Had she been in the library that evening on his return, there is no doubt he would have brought out his great news without delay. But the more he delayed, the harder it was for him to begin. She was bound to make some kind of objection on the score of Vicky's youth. But if Vicky was old enough to carry on a clandestine flirtation with young Sedgwick, she was old enough to be married. That was the way he looked at it. Vicky needed a husband, and Ernest Soames was in his opinion the very man for her.

When this business was put through, Lord Pendre felt that he could concentrate his thoughts upon Eustace' future. As for this ridiculous wish of his to know the Treshams, that must be tabooed. Nipped in the bud. For more than twenty-six years Lord Pendre had closed his doors to Catholics and to any mention of the Catholic Church. He had his own excellent reasons for this, and if Eustace had possessed

Philip's disposition he would not have hesitated to divulge them to him. But with Eustace, you never quite knew where you were, nor what perverse attitude he might adopt. Perversity was the key-note of his character. Eustace was so far not aware that he was treading on highly dangerous ground, and it was unfortunately impossible to indicate the precise danger to him. He would simply have to accept his father's decision in the matter, and if he regarded it as capricious or arbitrary, that couldn't be helped. Lord Pendre smiled behind his beard,—he was still master in his own house, thank Heaven! He had never abrogated authority for the sake of peace, like so many foolish, indulgent, latter-day parents, who believed that because their sons had fought and in many instances bled for their country, they must be allowed to have their own way forever after. . . .

2

When Monday came, Lord Pendre perceived that he could not delay any longer; he must take his wife into his confidence.

It was no easy matter, and indeed he had seen but little of her during the last few days. He had been unusually busy also, and had had to spend a night in Chester, seeing to the sale of some property.

But on the Monday afternoon he found her having tea alone. It seemed to him quite providential, especially when he learned that Eustace and Vicky and Pamela had all motored over to St. David's Bay for the afternoon, intending to go to the "pictures" and have tea there.

But even with this prospect of an uninterrupted interview with his wife, he could not quite bring himself to begin.

"You haven't forgotten that Soames is dining here?" he said suddenly, putting down his tea-cup.

"Oh, no—I haven't forgotten. Did you tell him eight o'clock?"

"Yes."

Another pause. Lady Pendre had finished her tea, and was now occupied with some knitting. The bright rose-colored silk she was knitting harmonized very perfectly with her pale grey dress.

"That reminds me," he said, "I've got something to tell you about Vicky."

She put down her work. "About Vicky?"

There was a faint note of alarm in her voice, almost as if she had already begun to suspect.

"Yes. Soames has spoken to me about her. I meant to tell you before, but I've never had an opportunity."

"What on earth can Mr. Soames have to say about her?"

"She is eighteen—she is old enough to think about marriage. In fact, we know she has been thinking of it. Barbara was engaged at that age. I am all for women marrying young. Soames will make her an excellent husband."

Lady Pendre listened, feeling that she must be dreaming But when she glanced up at her husband's face, she saw nothing there but harsh determination. He always looked like that when he had a difficult piece of business to accomplish.

"You can't be serious, Hugo," she said indignantly. "Ernest and Vicky—why, it's impossible . . . she doesn't even like him! Besides, she is far too young—she isn't even out."

"Barbara agrees with me that the sooner she marries the better. It can't be too soon in my opinion, now she's begun to run after young ineligible men like Sedgwick."

"She will never marry Mr. Soames," returned his wife, with decision. The idea was so preposterous that she wasn't even alarmed at the suggestion. "He is more than twenty years older than she is. He's nearly as old as I am. It's perfectly ridiculous for him to think of Vicky!"

"His age doesn't signify—he'll be able to keep her in better order. He's got a bit of a temper—I daresay he'll make her afraid of him."

"You can't make her marry a man she dislikes just because you think it would be a good thing for her!"

"I don't think she does dislike him. I've heard her call him an old sport, whatever that may mean. Will you speak to her about it or shall I?"

"I am certainly not going to. You can tell her if you like —it won't make the slightest difference. You'd much better let me talk to Mr. Soames!"

"My dear, Ernest is very deeply attached to her. He is quite serious—he doesn't want to wait beyond the summer. And I may tell you that the settlements he's prepared to make are quite beyond her deserts."

"She won't have anything to say to him, and it would be far kinder to tell him so!"

"She'll do what she's told. I'm not going to have her meeting young men in the Pendre woods."

"But he wanted to marry Barbara five years ago. Why didn't you insist upon that? It would have been far more suitable!"

"She was already in love with Gerard, who had a great deal more to offer. But in Vicky's case there's no Hammond."

"I always dislike the idea of a man wanting to marry one sister because he couldn't get the other."

Still, she was not greatly perturbed by the fantastic suggestion. Vicky was not a person who could be coerced into taking a line of action diametrically opposed to her own wishes. Accustomed as she was to yield in the long run to her father's iron will, she was yet unlikely to submit supinely to an engagement so little to her taste, especially when she was avowedly in love with another man.

Lady Pendre would have been thankful to see Vicky married to Martin. Grievously wounded in the War, he had spent many weeks of his long convalescence at Pendre, made welcome there because he had been Philip's great friend. Vicky had done a great deal to help him during that tedious time of suffering and distress. She was only sixteen, but even then she had presented an odd admixture of childishness and maturity. She had devoted herself to him almost from the day of his arrival, and she was a charming little companion—Eustace' influence had done that for her—thus, she had never tired of reading aloud to Martin, of playing chess or cards with him, and amusing him in all kinds of ways. A deep friendship sprang up between them, unobserved by Lord Pendre, who was very busy at the time and often away from home. But it was not till the day drew near for Martin's departure that his love declared itself. Miss Brigstocke had witnessed in silence the gradual growth and development of the affair. But she had said nothing. Martin was suddenly banished. Gossip had reached Pamela's ears—she passed it on to "Fa." Vicky was in disgrace; she had appalling scenes with her father. But she continued to correspond with Martin until this, too, was discovered. Thereafter they had only had that one meeting in the woods, which had unfortunately stimulated Lord Pendre's desire to get his daughter suitably settled in life.

When he had decided upon a certain course of action, he was always alarmingly precipitate in the accomplishment of it. It was said that much of his success in business was due to this habit of carefully-weighed decision followed by prompt action. He introduced the same principles into his private domestic life. Cold and calculating in his wary approach, his decision once taken materialized with an almost ruthless rapidity, reminding one of the cruel relentlessness of a river in flood.

Thus, from past experience Lady Pendre knew that to her husband this surprising scheme for promoting a marriage between Vicky and Soames was no new idea. It had probably been simmering in his brain for some time past, and the unwisdom of delay had perhaps been brought home to him by the discovery of his daughter's recent interview with Sedgwick.

Once or twice lately he had come into collision with Vicky over the matter of Pamela's continued presence in the house; he judged it therefore expedient to formulate decisive plans for her future. And aware that a tacit rebellion against him reigned in the hearts of his two younger children, he no doubt deemed that the moment for direct action had arrived.

Why couldn't his wife look at the matter sensibly? But all women, when it came to a question of marriage, were incurably sentimental! She ought to have been thankful to seize this opportunity of banishing such a turbulent element as Vicky from the house. Pamela would, of course, remain and play the daughter's part, which she did with such tact and grace.

And then she was so decorative! She put Vicky a little in the shade, suggesting a contrast between the highly-finished product and something that was still a little wild and raw and immature . . .

3

Lady Pendre had risen and had gone across the room to the writing-table. She felt that she could not bear her husband's nearness any more. He always wanted her to see with his eyes, and if she failed to do this he was apt to get huffy and offended and to accuse her of not caring for him. His love for her was his one weak spot. And, knowing that weakness, he feared lest anything should touch it, coming between them to its hurt.

All these years he had been accustomed to lay down the law about the children, settling what they should do and what they should not do; and she had never remonstrated with him even when his decisions were on the side of harshness. But now, all of a sudden, he felt her tacit determination to prevent this marriage. She meant to oppose him. This attitude of hers was so novel that he did not quite know how to deal with it. And then only the other day she had actually invited him to grant Eustace an increase of liberty! . . .

"We might give him an opportunity of speaking to her this evening after dinner," he resumed.

"Oh no—don't do that—she ought to have some preparation—" was her rather breathless answer.

"But you said just now that you preferred not to tell her."

"Because I'd no idea you meant to be so precipitate. Couldn't you wait a little?"

"No—I see no use in waiting. That's never been my policy. Make up your mind to do a thing, and do it! Besides—things might happen."

"What things?"

"We needn't go into that. But Vicky is getting more and more difficult to manage, and then this unfortunate and unreasonable dislike she has taken to Pamela is so very disturbing."

"Then you'd better get rid of Pamela!"

"Get rid of Pamela?"

"Yes. After all, Vicky's our own daughter, and if we must choose between them, Pamela ought to be the one to go."

Her cheeks usually so pale were flushed. There was a rare hint of temper in her voice.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"I made the mistake of believing you were devoted to Pamela!"

"Not to the extent of getting rid of Vicky because the two girls can't hit it off," she assured him.

"I should be very sorry to see her driven out of the house because Vicky's so inordinately rude to her. There's no question as to which of the two I should prefer to remain."

"Is Pamela in favor of this marriage?" she inquired ironically.

"I haven't discussed it with her."

She was almost relieved to find that the girl had had no hand in this matrimonial scheme. That slight disposition to intrigue that had sometimes been apparent in Pamela's character, had from time to time alarmed Lady Pendre. She was quite capable of trying to get rid of Vicky, who had unconsciously become her rival. There was little doubt that the thought of marrying Eustace had seemed to her a favorable solution of her own problem, though it was difficult to say whether she was still aiming at this. But she was very ambitious, and there was no doubt that she had every reason to wish to consolidate the links that bound her to Pendre. This solution had also indubitably received favorable consideration from both Lord Pendre and Barbara.

It might be that in ridding the house of Vicky's stormy, turbulent little presence, he believed there would be a greater probability of realizing these hopes. His next words seemed oddly enough to corroborate Lady Pendre' conclusions upon this point.

"It seems absurd," he remarked, "but I have an idea we shall find it much easier to bring Eustace to a more reasonable frame of mind when Vicky's out of the way. She's a much stronger character than he is—she encourages him—eggs him on. Left to himself, I have always thought we should find him perfectly amenable. I remember when they were naughty as children it was always Vicky's fault, though she was so much the younger of the two. I hope this marriage will take place very soon—in the early autumn, perhaps. There's nothing on earth to wait for, and Soames is very much opposed to a long engagement."

Lady Pendre was silent for a moment. Then she said coldly:

"I can promise you there'll be no engagement."

"Well, we shall see about that," he answered dryly.

He went out of the room, resolving to concentrate his mind upon this marriage of Vicky's to the exclusion of all other domestic problems, for he seldom allowed himself to execute more than one important project at a time. Of course there must inevitably be an interview with Eustace—a sharp reminder of his absolute dependence, and of the fact that if he wanted money he must work for it. No slacking. He hadn't worked hard himself all his life and amassed wealth in order to keep his son in idleness. But there must be no scene to-night. Soames must find a calm, harmonious, united family, with Vicky at her undisturbed best—the girl knew how to be charming when she chose. And Pamela's presence would prevent it from being quite a family party. . . .

After her husband's departure, Lady Pendre made a rapid resolution. She wasn't going to have this offer of marriage flung, so to speak, at Vicky's head without the slightest preparation. The girl must be warned. She went up to her room, rang for her maid, and a message was dispatched to Vicky without delay.

4

The summons was an unusual one, especially at that hour when her parents were generally sitting together in the library, with perhaps Pamela to keep them company. Vicky was slightly perturbed by the message. She wondered idly what had happened, as she hurried downstairs to her mother's room.

As she came in she looked very young, almost a child, with her small sensitive face, her slight undeveloped figure. The fashion of wearing short hair and skirts bestowed upon girls of the present day a curiously child-like and immature aspect. Lady Pendre could not help mentally contrasting Vicky now, with what she herself had been at that age. She could remember just what she had looked like, and even the very clothes she had worn on the day when Hugo Wingrave, afterward the first Lord Pendre, had asked her to be his wife. And she knew, too, that she had been in every sense a woman, with a fairly comprehensive experience of life, its difficulties, its sorrows and anxieties. Indeed at that age she had never been free from anxiety about her own father. She had been at once his child, his nurse and his companion. She had petted and humored him, and tried to keep him in safe paths despite the natural tendency of his feet to stray into those perilous ones that offered more amusement, and thus she had sacrificed a great deal of her own youth to him. And not only her youth . . . she was still, in a sense, sacrificing herself for him although he had been dead for more than twenty-five years. The selfishness of a highly selfish person is often felt long after he or she has left this world for another. And so it had been with Major Kelsey.

When Lady Pendre looked at her daughter now, she could not help thinking of the dreadful, far-reaching consequences of her own father's selfishness. And it made her more than ever determined that Vicky should not be sacrificed.

"What is it, Mummie dear?"

"Aren't you feeling well, Vicky?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Only, I can't shake off this cold."

"I hope it isn't worse?"

"No—but it makes me feel so stupid. I thought of having my dinner upstairs—in bed. Just some bread and milk. Do you think Dad would make an unholy fuss if I did?"

"I think perhaps if you possibly can you'd better dine downstairs. Of course if you're really feeling ill, that makes a difference. But you haven't forgotten, have you, that Ernest Soames is coming?"

"Oh, he won't miss me. He enjoys talking to Pamela. How I wish he'd propose to her! Do you think it's at all likely?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. And I think he likes seeing you too. You'd better wear your white velvet frock—it's warmer."

"Oh, I don't think I want to come down. Mr. Soames is such an old bore, isn't he? I'm sure I don't want to talk to him. And you'll have such a nice peaceful evening without me. Besides, he's Dad's friend. Eustie and I think him too old for words!"

It did not seem a very propitious attitude, and Lady Pendre began to feel that even the very slight alarm she had experienced had been causeless. She felt an immense secret relief at the thought. She really wondered why Ernest should ever have seriously considered the question of marrying a very young girl like Vicky. Or perhaps it was the result of "suggestion"? Her husband must have had the idea in his mind for some time past.

"I think I'd better tell you, dear, that Mr. Soames is really coming on purpose to see you."

"To see me?" Vicky echoed incredulously. "What on earth for? Perhaps he's heard that 'Spot' killed one of his pheasants last week? Eustie and I were trespassing, but I had 'Spot' on the leash, only he got away. I wonder, though, who can have told him?"

Lady Pendre suppressed a smile.

"You must have a guilty conscience," she observed, "but whether Mr. Soames has heard about it or not, I can't tell you. It isn't at all for that reason he wishes to see you."

"Are you sure, Mummie? Because if he's heard anything at all about me from Dad, I feel that it can't be anything to my advantage!"

But an odd misgiving that assailed her for the first time, made the words sound a little unconvincing even to her own ears.

"Mummie darling—don't be mysterious! Tell me!"

"He wishes to marry you," said Lady Pendre, quietly. "Perhaps he may tell you so this evening. I thought it would be better to warn you."

Vicky stared at her mother in angry astonishment. Then she gave a short sarcastic laugh.

"Has he forgotten that only a few years ago he was dead keen on marrying Barbara?"

"That may have made him think of you. You're not so very unlike."

"Martin always said he liked me. He was inclined to be jealous, but I scoffed at the idea."

"Martin!" echoed Lady Pendre.

"Why, it would be almost like a deceased wife's sister," continued Vicky, in a hard angry tone. "I wonder why he should imagine that I'm any more likely to marry him than Barbara was? He's years too old for either of us."

"I want you to be very kind and polite in what you say to him. He is, as you say, a great deal older than you are, and this may be a very serious thing for him. At any rate, he has quite convinced your father of—of his affection for you. And, Vicky dear—there's something else—"

"Yes, Mummie? Any more dismal surprises?"

"Your father has encouraged him. He wishes this marriage to take place." She watched her daughter's face as she spoke.

"He can't make me marry him, though," remarked Vicky, with cheerful decision. "He can make me do most disagreeable things he wants me to, but not this!"

"I don't want you to decide anything in a hurry. Think it over quietly. Soames is a good man—a rich man—you'd be settled near us. We shouldn't lose you. . . . And you'd have everything in the way of wealth and comfort—just as you have now."

Lady Pendre felt that in justice to Ernest Soames she must set this side of the matter quite clearly before her daughter. But she knew already that she was pleading a lost cause. Worldly material things had no charm for Vicky.

"Why, what do you mean, Mummie? These things don't make any difference to me. I'm as certain that I don't want to marry him as I can be. I'm not sure that I shall ever marry, but if I do, I suppose it will be Martin." She made the admission quite frankly. "Dad will never let him come here again, though, now he suspects me of liking him."

Lady Pendre made another effort.

"Vicky—sometimes the very fact of a man's love makes a girl feel differently about him. That's really the reason of a great many marriages. And it's why I don't want you to decide anything in a hurry. Take time. It's a very important thing both for him and yourself."

"I do wish that Barbara had married him!" exclaimed Vicky, fervently.

"You would have a beautiful home—plenty of money—I'm sure he'd be devoted and kind."

Vicky went up to her mother and put her thin arms round her neck. Lady Pendre was unused to such demonstrations from her younger daughter and it touched her.

"Darling Mummie, you can't possibly want me to marry that old man! He's got a red nose and his hair is turning grey!" She uttered the words with all the cruel contempt of youth for the manifestations of age. "He must be more than forty. And I'm barely eighteen. When I was born he was older than I am now. The only thing, of course, that could induce me to marry him would be to get shut of Dad forever! And I'm not sure that I don't really prefer Dad," she added, with terrible candor.

"Do you really want to leave us so much, Vicky?"

Again the thin arms were clasped round her neck, and Vicky imprinted a shy little kiss on her mother's brow.

"Not you, Mummie darling. But Dad's been pretty impossible lately, hasn't he? I expect he's aching to get rid of me. Perhaps it's a put-up job between him and Pamela!"

"No—no—I'm sure it isn't. He says Pamela knows nothing of it."

"And when I come to think of it, it isn't so much on account of Dad that Eustie and I want to get away from here. It's on account of the . . . shadow."

At this word which only a few nights ago she had heard from the lips of her son, Lady Pendre visibly started. Her face quivered momentarily; it was as if a light wind had passed over the motionless surface of a very still lake, ruffling it almost imperceptibly.

The shadow? Yes, Eustace had said that Vicky was aware of it too. And she too wished to escape from it—this intangible, menacing, sinister thing that brooded invisibly over Pendre.

Vicky's face was white as paper. It seemed that in mentioning the shadow she was inviting it to draw near and envelop her in its deep impenetrable folds.

She flung herself on her knees and put her arms about her mother, as if to seek the comfort of that human contact amid a scene of confusion and terror.

"What have we done?" she cried. "I'm sure you can tell me if you choose! You can't have lived with it all these years without knowing at least *why* it's there!"

Lady Pendre shrank a little away. Eustace' words rang in her ears, shrilly, accusingly: *Vicky thinks it's because one of us must have offended God. . . .*

She felt Vicky's icy cheek pressed against hers. And then suddenly pitying her, she stooped a little and held her daughter in a very close and comforting clasp. She had not held Vicky thus since she was quite a small child, but there was no trace of awkwardness or of unaccustomedness in her gesture. At heart she was a very maternal woman, with a deep love for all small and defenseless things. And, in a sense, the intimate human contact, so rarely sought or given, was infinitely reassuring to them both. For a few minutes they remained thus, without speaking. Vicky was the first to break free, with the rough gesture of a young animal.

"Don't mind me, Mummie!—I really never meant to mention it to you. Honestly I didn't. But just then it seemed so frightfully close—you must have felt it, too, didn't you? I used to hope, of course, that Martin would come and take me away, directly I was old enough to be married. And now I suppose I am old enough—but he's in Malta—he doesn't dare write—it all seems so hopeless! But he's such a dear, and so splendid, isn't he? And he loved darling old Phip so much. . . . Is it quite impossible to think of my marrying him? I'm sure he'd make me frightfully happy."

She lifted her face, white, childish, appealing, with a queer look of exhaustion upon it, as if she had just passed through some strange nervous crisis. . . .

"Not impossible . . . but I'm afraid your father would never give his consent, so you might be very badly off."

Lady Pendre saw that the mere suggestion of her marriage with another man had turned Vicky's thoughts passionately toward Martin Sedgwick. She did not think that anything Soames could say would have the effect of dispossessing that younger and earlier rival.

"He is very generous when he approves, and if you were to marry Mr. Soames, I am sure he'd give you just what he gave Barbara."

"I don't want money—I hate it!" said Vicky, passionately. "I want light and fresh air and freedom—just the things I can't have here! And do you think Mr. Soames could give them to me? I should feel just as much a prisoner in his great rich stuffy house as I do here."

She rose and stood there, a childish almost pathetic figure.

"Don't, don't try to persuade me, Mummie. Why, Martin would never forgive me!"

"I don't want to persuade you. I only thought you'd better know—I felt it wouldn't be fair to spring it upon you without a word of preparation."

She rose and went up to Vicky, taking her face between her hands and kissing her two or three times with a kind of delicate, tender deliberation.

"I want you to be happy," she whispered. "I want you not to feel shadows . . . and things like that."

Vicky almost worshiped her beautiful mother then. She gazed up into her face, with dark, humid eyes.

"Oh, Mummie, I do love you," she said, smiling through her tears. "And I'm sorry I've been such a beast to you so often. But you've never let me come quite close to you before, have you? I used to think you didn't care, when Dad was angry and punished me."

"I did care. But I couldn't interfere."

"If I'd known for certain that you cared I shouldn't have minded half so much!"

"You must never think I don't care, Vicky. But a woman's position is often a very difficult one. She may be torn two ways—between her duty to her husband and her love for her child." Her beautiful eyes met Vicky's quite squarely. The child was old enough now to know that it hadn't always been easy—that there had been a conflict of love as well as of loyalty.

Vicky slipped out of the room. It was time to go and dress for dinner—to put on the white velvet dress with its heavy old-fashioned folds.

But surely she would in future always be able to approach her mother with that new fearless intimacy born of to-night's crisis? Their interview had broken down some if not all of the barriers that stood between them and perfect confidence. At any rate, Vicky reflected, there wouldn't always be that dreadful thought behind all the events, that her mother didn't care what happened to her. She did care, although it would be impossible after that timid reluctant explanation to ask her to intervene between her husband and her child. But the aloof, detached attitude would, Vicky felt, be far more comprehensible in the future. She would understand that it was something that really couldn't be helped, since indubitably it formed part of the mystery which the children had always felt characterized the mutual attitude of their father and mother. Vicky herself had never been able to determine whether it was on her mother's side one of active hatred or deepest sympathy. But it was a mystery to which they possessed no clue, and even the hint that Lady Pendre must sometimes have suffered in silence, threw no ultimate light upon it. Silence was compatible with either attitude. . . .

5

Lady Pendre was once more alone. Those two fateful interviews, following so rapidly one upon another, had exhausted her.

But with regard to Vicky, she felt that something had been definitely achieved. She had established a friendly, even an intimate, relation with her daughter, such as had never before existed. She was a reserved woman, and to take the necessary steps had always seemed to her difficult, even impossible. Only a crisis such as the present one, could have broken down her icy reserve, and in the attempt to save her daughter from an ambitious, loveless marriage, she had found a straight way to that daughter's heart.

There were, however, things she could not explain to her children. The shadow for instance. . . . Eustace and Vicky had divined its existence even while they possessed no clue as to its nature. Barbara had escaped all knowledge of it; she was a regular Wingrave, hard, insensitive, unimaginative. Her ideals were all frankly materialistic, and her present life fully satisfied them. With Philip, conjecture was more difficult, for he too could be reserved. Yet, that last letter of his. . . .

As for Eustace, she could never think of that interview she had had with him only a few nights ago, without pain. In looking back upon it she felt that she had done nothing to help him, but possibly a great deal to alienate him still further. But all his wishes and requests had approached too closely to that forbidden territory she was bound in honor—or was it dishonor?—never to cross.

Her husband's mind was for the moment far too much occupied with this proposed marriage between Soames and Vicky, to spare much thought for the discontent and incipient rebellion of his son. The first thing, in his opinion, was to get Vicky out of the way. She was the one to create disturbance, a stormy petrel, whose advent heralded tempest. This marriage must first be accomplished, and then he could turn his whole attention to Eustace.

CHAPTER VIII

Refusal

1

ERNEST SOAMES was a thin, slightly bald, man of forty, with a hard-cut, weather-beaten face, a sharp nose rather red at the tip, a peaked chin, thin lips, and greyish eyes. His red hair, in which Vicky had pitilessly discerned the snows of eld, was carefully arranged to conceal as much as possible of his cranium.

He was deeply attached to all forms of sport, and hunted regularly four days a week throughout the season, except when he was laid up—as not infrequently happened—with broken bones. The list of his fractures seemed to violate the laws of chance, and many people listened to the recital of them with sturdily checked yawns.

He possessed at Moth Hill some of the finest pheasant shooting in the county, and he was an ardent fisherman. His friendship for Lord Pendre was solidly founded upon a mutual love of golf. This absorbing pastime threw them a great deal into each other's society. Soames also found him a useful man to consult about investments; under his aegis he was now enjoying a much larger income than formerly. That son-in-law of his, Gerard Hammond, had his finger on the pulse, so to speak, of the City. He seemed to have a kind of sixth sense by which he was enabled unerringly to foretell when a thing was going up, and, what was really more important, when it was likely in the near future to fall. The game of stocks and shares was new to Ernest Soames, who had been brought up with a proper regard for gilt-edged investments with small but sure returns.

No physical exertion had ever been known to tire him; he was as hard as nails. He had killed animals of all sizes and of varying degrees of ferocity, in most of the countries of the world that offered facilities for so doing. He was proud of his narrow escapes, of having just missed being trampled upon by an elephant or mauled by a lion. He was always in training, always, as he would express it, "fit." The intellectual life had few attractions for him; the hours he spent indoors he counted wasted.

Soames had felt the slight awkwardness of approaching a man with matrimonial intent on behalf of one daughter when he had already been refused by the other. He had indeed genuinely admired Barbara Wingrave; he had felt, too, that she would make a charmingly decorative adjunct to his home, which even then had begun to feel the urgent need of a feminine presence. Her refusal had made him volunteer for service in East Africa, whence he had returned soon after the Armistice to find Barbara already the wife of another man and absorbed in conjugal and maternal duties. And, then, of late he had begun to see in Vicky the longed-for woman. She was perhaps less conventionally beautiful than her sister; she was also far more childish and unformed, but she was full of a certain wild charm that appealed to him, even though it did give her on occasion the aspect of having breathlessly escaped from the nursery.

To his astonishment and relief, Lord Pendre had met him half-way, directly he had gathered to what objective his stuttering and embarrassed phrases tended. He wanted Vicky, did he? Very well, then—he should have her. Lord Pendre promised to promote the marriage as far as it lay in his power. From a pecuniary point of view Soames would find that Vicky was quite as good a match as her elder sister, and then she hadn't—it was almost the only thing he could think of to her credit—one-half of the extravagant tastes that Barbara possessed. She would make him a good little wife, directly she settled down. He might find her a bit of a handful at first—he had done so himself. Lord Pendre did not voice these thoughts aloud, but he was aware that Ernest Soames' wish to marry Vicky had made him feel quite tenderly toward her. She was going to be a credit to him, after all. And when once she was out of the way, things would surely go on much more smoothly and quietly at Pendre. A slight feeling of compassion for Soames crossed his mind at this juncture, for Vicky's presence in any house could hardly make for peace. He wasn't sure that it wouldn't have been more honorable to give Soames a delicate hint as to the difficulties of the task he was so eager to undertake. . . .

"I wonder what made him take a fancy to Vicky," Lady Pendre thought, as she took her seat at one end of the long polished dining-table that night.

Opposite to her was her husband, immense, formidable, titanic, but imperturbable and bland, with an almost sardonic look of self-satisfaction upon his swarthy face. It was the look of a man who was just about to conclude a highly successful deal with another of equal ability.

Vicky and Soames sat side by side, and opposite to them were Eustace and Pamela. Pamela was looking very lovely, and slightly more animated than usual. Like Lady Pendre, she had received a wholly false impression as to the reason of Ernest Soames' increasedly frequent visits to the house of late. And she had not quite made up her mind what she was going to say to him. Subconsciously, however, she knew that she intended to accept him. She could not be blind to the material advantages accruing to the position of Mrs. Soames of Moth Hill Park, and she was inclined to believe that romance only entered a woman's life once. She had had hers, and it had perished, but there were still solid and attractive things to be found in the market and she meant to capture some of them if she could. And although the Pendres, with the exception of Vicky, were very kind to her and offered her a practically unlimited hospitality, she had lately begun to feel that this state of things couldn't go on forever. A few years ago Soames would have had no more chance with her than he had had with Barbara, but she was now placed in a very different position, and felt more than a little inclined to listen to his suit. Once or twice Lord Pendre had even hinted to her, as if to prepare her, that there was a reason for Soames' visits—she would know all about it soon—he hoped that something might come of it. Rich chap and all that, and a good sportsman. . . . There could surely be no other attraction at Pendre, Pamela thought, for she had always underrated Vicky's significance.

Both she and Eustace were wholly ignorant of impending events. Vicky had had no opportunity of confiding in her brother. But she would tell him later—they would laugh over it together. Fancy old Soames! . . .

The girl was looking rather pale and worn, the result of an obstinate cold which had pulled her down a good deal, and of the emotional crisis through which she had so recently passed. But Soames thought he had never seen her look so perfect as she did to-night in her regal little dress of white velvet with a string of pearls round her neck. Her short dark hair was brushed off her face, revealing all the beauty of her small square brow. Her dark eyes were almost feverishly bright. She had a look of eager, restless youth, full of inquiry, full of courage.

Lord Pendre glanced at his daughter with approval. He was thinking of her now as Soames' future wife, and as he saw them side by side he felt a certain compunction because the disparity in their years was so cruelly marked. But it constituted no tragedy in his eyes. He comforted himself with the reflection that Vicky required a firm hand over her, and Soames being so much older would be certain to wield it; he was credited in the neighborhood with a ferocious temper when roused. A young, foolish, and indulgent husband would be the ruin of Vicky. She could only be adequately controlled by fear, as Lord Pendre had discovered in her nursery days.

Of course she looked young, even childish for her years—she was so slight and straight. But her neck and arms, though thin, were very white; she had the warm white skin of her mother. There was a certain immature charm about her which her father reluctantly recognized.

He had no idea that his wife had told her anything of what was impending. He had gathered that Giselda's attitude would be one of resistance, passive resistance. Perhaps he would have been annoyed had he known of the emotional scene that had taken place between mother and daughter just before dinner.

Unfortunately, Soames, unaware that he was treading upon thorny ground, mentioned the Treshams. He had heard that Mrs. Tresham had been less well even than usual of late.

"I hear they're Catholics," Eustace observed.

"Yes. I didn't know it myself until after I'd let them Glen Cottage. Mrs. Dyrham never mentioned it. And of course I'd rather they hadn't been," added Soames. "We have so few in the neighborhood now, that for their own sakes they should keep away. Of course it was different when the Chittendens had this place—it made a nucleus for Catholic families hereabouts."

He looked toward his host as he spoke, and for the first time became aware of his slightly constrained silence. Lord Pendre was frowning, and his under-lip was thrust a little forward. He looked as black as thunder.

But Eustace was too desperately interested in what Soames was saying, to pay any attention to his father. He bent forward eagerly and said:

"I never heard the Chittendens were Catholics! Did they have a chapel here?"

"Yes—in what you've made your ballroom," said Soames.

"Really? In the ballroom? I wonder what their ghosts would say if they could come back," Eustace remarked, with languid irony.

The silence was ominous, and Ernest became aware for the first time of a certain constraint that menaced the harmony of the evening. He, poor man, was innocent of any desire to offend; more than that, he was especially anxious to please. But he had never discussed the subject of religion with Lord Pendre, and had thought little of his refusal—now pretty well known in the neighborhood—to allow his wife to call on Mrs. Tresham. Nor had it ever occurred to him that the reason was in any way connected with her religion. He had no idea that Lord Pendre "felt strongly" on the subject—it would have seemed somehow quite out of keeping with his general indifference to spiritual things, and with those broad-minded liberal views he really believed were his.

Lord Pendre glanced savagely at his son.

"Let us hope their ghosts have long since learnt the error of their ways," he observed sententiously.

"I wonder which of us can be sure of that," said Eustace.

The knowledge that there had once been a Catholic chapel in the house moved him strangely. It was gone now—that wonder-thing—and the great lofty room, once consecrated to holy uses, had become a resplendent ballroom. It had been used only on a few occasions, but Eustace could remember a brilliant scene there to celebrate Barbara's coming out. Philip had come back from the trenches on a week's leave; he had not been very well. That dated it—the first winter of the War. A sudden up-rush from Eustace' subconsciousness showed him Barbara then in her most radiant beauty, dancing with Soames. She must have been eighteen then, just Vicky's age, and Phip was a year older but had already had several months' service. He was a slender stripling with dark hair and bright dark eyes. . . .

Eustace was roused from these dreams of the past by Vicky's clear young voice saying emphatically:

"It seems an awful desecration—even if we don't believe what they did!"

Soames' presence gave her the requisite courage to speak her mind. Otherwise she would have incurred a sharp rebuke. As it was, her father merely frowned heavily at her.

"I should like to know more of the Treshams," said Eustace. "I met Miss Tresham the other day—her car had broken down just the other side of Llyn. Mrs. Welby was with her." It was an easy way of informing his father exactly what had happened.

"Ah, a very capable woman, Mrs. Welby," remarked Soames. "I imagine she pretty well runs the house for them."

Being perfectly tolerant himself, with the tolerance born of complete indifference, Soames would have been astonished had he realized Lord Pendre's attitude toward these estimable and harmless people.

"Have they got a long lease of Glen Cottage?" inquired Lord Pendre.

"Seven years, with the option of renewing. And they haven't been there quite two."

"No chance of getting rid of them then?" inquired Lord Pendre.

"Not the slightest. And really they're excellent tenants—give no sort of trouble. Mrs. Tresham is half Italian, I believe—she is very delicate and hardly ever gets beyond the garden. Sad, because she is still quite young. It must be horribly dull for the poor little girl, but Mrs. Dyrham tells me she's devoted to her mother, and doesn't mind."

Pamela, aware of cross-currents, remarked: "I really wonder, all the same, at their coming here. There are no Catholic families in the neighborhood except a few shopkeepers at Llyn. It seems so odd to settle here, miles from anywhere. And they're not even near a church—it's ever so far from the one at Llyn."

"Oh, little Miss Tresham thinks nothing of that in her two-seater," answered Soames, pleasantly; "she drives herself down in time for the eight o'clock Mass every day, I'm told."

2

Eight o'clock Mass . . . Eustace kept his eyes rigorously fixed upon his plate, and thus was unaware that his parents had both bestowed upon him a swift, interrogative glance.

Eight o'clock . . . He wondered whether he would be able to escape sufficiently early so as to meet Miss Tresham either on her way there or on her return. For although he hardly yet realized it, her religion constituted for him one of her principal attractions, and that she cared passionately for it, did but enhance her value in his eyes.

He was, however, still so ignorant as to what that religion might entail in the matter of faith that she seemed to have become all of a sudden an almost mysterious remote figure, possessing an other-worldliness concealed beneath the girlish charm and gaiety of her manner.

"Old Mrs. Chittenden died at a very advanced age, as I expect you remember," said Ernest, turning to Lord Pendre. "She had outlived all her near relations, and the very distant cousin who inherited Pendre couldn't afford to keep it up. That's how it came into the market. But I remember the old lady telling me once that the Lamp in the chapel had been kept burning before the Tabernacle for nearly five centuries—even all through the penal times. Pendre being so far from the main road, they escaped molestation."

Eustace stirred restlessly in his seat. Again Soames' carelessly proffered information had made a profound impression upon him. How strange to think that only about a dozen years ago the place had been in Catholic hands . . . this very house in which he was living now. Did anything remain of its ancient mystical atmosphere, or had all that been rudely destroyed by the wealth and materialism of the Wingraves? Quenched like the Lamp that had burned before the Tabernacle for five centuries? Oh, the pity of it—even if one didn't believe that the Catholic Church was right! Even so, it was the destruction of something historical, that stretched back across the ages to the days when Englishmen *did* hold that Faith and were ready and willing to die in its defense.

Yet, surely, something of it all must remain—an atmosphere—an "aura"—it couldn't have been completely lost forever. Perhaps, indeed, it was one of those things that couldn't be utterly eliminated.

Then involuntarily the thought occurred to him: "Perhaps I shall be able to light that Lamp again!" The words echoed in his ears as clearly as if someone had uttered them aloud, and he could hardly believe that those present had failed to hear them too. And he felt guilty, almost as if he had had a secret disloyal thought.

"I'm thankful to think it was extinguished, and that all it stood for has been banished forever from Pendre," said Lord Pendre, in a loud, rather angry voice. He flung the words down almost like a challenge, as if he were aware that those present were feeling a little sentimental regret for the destruction of something old. An uncomfortable silence ensued, and now it did really occur to Soames, who throughout the conversation had been extraordinarily obtuse, that the subject under discussion was not an agreeable one to his host, nor, judging by her pale and troubled face, to his hostess. But Eustace' ardent interest had encouraged him to talk, and he had felt, too, that Vicky was lending him her eager young attention. And tonight he was thinking much more about Vicky than about her father.

Now, however, he grew slightly red and uncomfortable, aware that he had inadvertently committed some *gaffe*. Lord Pendre's face as well as his voice, his rough harsh words, betrayed anger. Eustace and Vicky seemed to relapse into an obstinate silence. They were accustomed, perhaps, to these sudden ebullitions of wrath.

The gossip of the neighborhood had informed Soames that the Wingrave children had been educated practically without religion, excepting for what they had been able to pick up at school. The subject had not been permitted to occupy an important place in their lives. He knew that they went to morning service with their father on Sundays, that none of them had been confirmed, and that Lady Pendre had never been known to set foot inside a church since her arrival at the Park twelve years before.

Perhaps there was some reason for this strange and unusual deficiency in their education. He had never been at all intimate with any member of the family except Lord Pendre, who was a very close man about his domestic affairs, and, in fact, hardly ever mentioned them.

As squire of the parish and patron of the Moth Hill living, Soames was a member of the Church of England. He accepted its obligations quite simply, just as other men in his position did. He seldom failed to attend the eleven o'clock service on Sunday morning or to read the lessons in a loud monotonous voice. He felt that in doing these things he was setting a practical example of loyalty to Church and

State. Like Lord Pendre, he mingled a flavor of patriotism with his religion. He had the feeling that a man could not be such a perfect patriot unless he belonged to the Established Church and acknowledged the King of England to be the defender of his faith. The Church of England! He glanced at Vicky. She was still so young that he felt he could easily supply any deficiencies in her spiritual education.

To-night her excessively youthful appearance annoyed him. She looked like a child, beside Miss Webb, for instance, but a highly intelligent rather headstrong child. As he looked at her, the support and encouragement he had received from her father lost something of their power to cheer him. When they were married they would inevitably be taken for father and daughter, rather than for husband and wife.

Then he began to wonder what Vicky's thoughts were, and how she amused herself and spent her time in this great house. Whether it was true, as gossip alleged, that she didn't hit off with Pamela Webb, or with her father, either, for that matter. Whether she could conceivably be happy in the future at Moth Hill. Of course he would take her to London—abroad—her youth would demand that.

Once he had believed that he loved Barbara, but it seemed to him that ancient feeling had been pale and shadowy beside the love he felt for this beautiful child. She had something Barbara had not and could never have. But he realized for the first time that there were rocks ahead. All her father's sympathy and support seemed unavailing now.

Somehow he wasn't sure that he would have the courage to approach her to-night. She seemed so far away, so elusive. There were, however, apparently no rival claimants in the field. Vicky—so her father had assured him—had not yet come out; she had seen practically no one. There was that much of hope, but it scarcely consoled him now. Vicky made him feel almost an old man. . . .

By the time Lady Pendre had left the room with her daughter and Pamela, Ernest had come to the miserable conclusion that the evening hadn't been at all a success; it had begun badly, owing to this insensate discussion about Catholics, and it would probably end worse.

3

Events, however, progressed according to schedule, and Ernest Soames found himself alone with Vicky at the far end of the green drawing room. The others had all settled down to a game of bridge in the big yellow room beyond, and through the arched doorway they could be seen sitting round the delicate old Chippendale card table.

There had been a little initial difficulty in persuading Pamela to join in the game. Vicky was a far better player than she was, she assured Lord Pendre modestly. But he only said rather curtly:

"Nonsense! Of course you must play. Vicky can talk to Ernest."

Pamela had imagined that her companion in solitude would certainly have been Eustace, and perhaps she had looked forward to an undisturbed and intimate conversation with him. She so seldom had the opportunity of talking to him; he was always out alone or else with Vicky, who "froze" on to him in her usual possessive manner. It was an unpleasant surprise to see Vicky and Soames disappear into the green drawing room, and for the first time she began to wonder whether it had not been purposely planned. But she dismissed the thought. She had formed the opinion that Ernest was fastidious about women, preferring something very highly finished and sophisticated. Not a raw undisciplined child, like Vicky.

Lord Pendre glanced complacently toward the two figures, one darkly and the other palely silhouetted against the faded green of the walls in the room beyond. Only the firelight threw a rosy glow over the ample heavy folds of Vicky's strange dress. He wondered what Soames was saying—what progress he was making. And for the second time he felt a certain novel almost sentimental tenderness toward Vicky. She wasn't going to disgrace him, after all. She was going to make a wealthy important marriage. Not so much money perhaps as her sister, but a very nice old property with a good house and the best pheasant shooting for miles round.

"I don't know if they've told you," Ernest began hesitatingly.

He had never funked a fence in his life, as he would have expressed it, but when he uttered those words he felt that his voice was not steady and that his knees had lost strength.

"Yes, Mummie has," answered Vicky, raising her great eyes to his. Her face was white, like some delicate soft woodland flower.

Involuntarily, Soames glanced back at the room they had just left.

Lady Pendre was sitting sideways to him, but he could see the clear-cut line of her profile—such a perfect profile—not a line out of place, and the dark hair growing just as it should. Always she had seemed to him a strange cold woman, very reticent and reserved. Barbara had once told him that her mother was cold to them all except to Philip. Her children were not intimate with her. She seemed to hold herself mysteriously aloof, displaying a Gallio-like indifference toward the petty happenings of Pendre. He was, therefore, the more surprised at Vicky's words. And he wondered what she had said to her young daughter to prepare her for his words of love. Had she used any influence, either for or against him? To persuade or dissuade? Would she support her husband in his wish that the marriage should take place very soon? It was impossible to answer these questions; he felt utterly in the dark, almost as if they were all strangers to him, although he had known them for twelve years. Why, he could remember Vicky as a baby thing of six, small for her age, darting about the garden like a white butterfly. . . .

Now he seemed to be aware of something mysterious and ambiguous, not only in the attitude of Lady Pendre to her husband, but also in her relation to her children. That absence of religion in their young lives. That detachment from their pains and pleasures—she always seemed to him like an onlooker, impartial, observant, indifferent. He had even heard that she had left the details of her children's upbringing to her husband. He had praised and rebuked, administered reward and punishment, and, despite his reputation for harshness, she had never been known to interfere. There must have been, therefore, a great lack of love in Vicky's life. Her situation had been, from all accounts, abnormal, and he found himself near pitying her as he thought of it. Yet it might be, too, that she was like her mother—cold, reticent, detached. . . .

All the same, she didn't look happy. She had nothing of Barbara's hard scintillating brightness, her arrogant self-satisfaction (he was quite sure now that Barbara wouldn't have suited him). No, Vicky had something of the frustrated aspect of a child whose favorite toy has been remorselessly confiscated. In repose, her face had a sullen, almost defiant look.

"You're very young," he said, after a pause. "And perhaps I have come too soon. Your father tells me you've been hardly anywhere yet. So I mustn't expect you to give me an answer at once—to-night. But I love you—I want you to be my wife."

Soames had a drawling indolent voice, not without an agreeable quality.

Vicky surveyed the situation rapidly and quite impartially; she was not unmindful of her mother's advice. And although Ernest's offer had not made her like him any better or view him with more favor, it had undoubtedly given him significance and importance in her eyes. She felt indeed slightly flattered that this man, her father's friend, so much older than herself, should care for her sufficiently to wish to make her his wife. It gave her a sense of pride and importance, a grown-up feeling that was novel and not unpleasant.

But although she was looking at him, listening to him, even weighing his words, her thoughts subconsciously were most unflatteringly filled with Martin. She was contrasting the two men. Martin Sedgwick had told her many times that he loved her. Marriage with him would have seemed a kind of joyous adventure. She could have fought for her own way—he had often told her that she was a little spit-fire and said he pitied the man she would marry, before he had so suddenly and inexplicably fallen in love with her himself.

But if she felt cramped at Pendre, starved of light and air and freedom, would she not feel a thousand times more cramped and starved at Moth Hill Park? It was a fine old Jacobean house, splendidly placed in the midst of a deer park, with a lovely lake formed by the natural widening of the river at that point. Its wealth was not new, and it possessed many cherished treasures of old furniture, pictures and china. It was shabby, because Ernest, like most men, never observed when things were worn out or required renovating unless the fact were brought home to him by an actual hole. But something in its dignified, shabby aspect had impressed Vicky with a sense of atmosphere that she duly appreciated. She had often thought how perfect it would have been if Barbara had accepted Soames' offer.

Then she glanced at him, at his thin peaked face, thin almost as a bone, the flesh drawn hard and tight over it, the skin weather-beaten and reddened from exposure to many climates. The scant reddish hair, touched with grey, the cold iron-grey eyes.

"He reminds me of Dad," she thought.

Soames was a smaller, slighter man than her father, but he had the same hard autocratic expression, as of one who for many years has had his own way. And Vicky knew what a man's hard autocratic selfish rule could be like, how it could hurt. She wanted to escape from it, not to place herself deliberately beneath it. But perhaps she might have chosen Ernest as the lesser of two evils if only she hadn't known and loved Martin.

At that moment she felt that she loved Martin very much indeed. His glorious blue eyes—his fair crisped hair—his laughing mouth and hard brown strong hands—everything about him. . . . The very way he looked and spoke, and moved. . . .

Soames waited patiently for her to speak. And again he wondered what was passing in that mind, so dear and yet so unknown to him.

"I'm very sorry," she said quietly, "but, you see, I'm only eighteen, and I don't want to marry yet."

"I would wait a year—two years," said Ernest Soames.

"But I hardly know you—you're Dad's friend," she went on, fearing that she had not been sufficiently explicit.

"That's no reason—is it?—why you shouldn't be my wife."

Vicky stood there, silent and a little alarmed. She wondered how Barbara had dealt with him in precisely similar circumstances. She had had, however, the advantage of being able to tell him that Girard Hammond stood in the way. Vickly inwardly believed that in Barbara's place she herself would have given the preference to Soames, so heartily did she dislike her brother-in-law's superior and slightly ironic manner.

It glanced through her mind then that it would be wise perhaps to give Ernest some hint about Martin Sedgwick. But on second thought she rejected the idea. Obviously Soames was being warmly backed by her father, and he would certainly feel obliged to tell him that he, Lord Pendre, had made a mistake, there was someone else . . . there was Martin Sedgwick. Her poor little secret had already been exposed to his censure, and she could imagine his fury when he learned that she had confided it to Soames' ears.

For days after that meeting in the Pendre woods, she had been in disgrace. Her father had handled the situation alone, as was his wont, dealing with it decisively and cruelly. He had written an angry letter to Martin, forbidding him ever to speak to his daughter again, and he had sent Miss Brigstocke away because her vigilance had failed at a critical moment.

Her mother had taken no part in all this. She had only shown a marvelous tenderness when Vicky had mentioned Martin's name to her. From her it evoked no anger, no menace of reprisals. Oh, why, if she was considered old enough to marry, wouldn't they let her marry Martin? She wouldn't have asked for any money—she would have just gone away quietly and married him, fearless and confident that his love would never fail her.

"I really don't care much for anyone except Mummie and Eustie—and perhaps one other person," she assured Soames now, with engaging candor. "So I am afraid it would be no use your waiting and hoping. You mustn't think that I don't like you, because I do. We've always—Eustice and I—thought you were a sport!"

This unexpected flattery brought a reluctant smile to Ernest's face. They had summed him up, then, these young things, and judged him, on the whole, not unkindly.

"Of course, I know it's awful cheek of me to speak to you like this," she pursued, "but I want to convince you that I can't marry you. There are all sorts of reasons. And I don't really much want to marry—Eustice and I think it's a fool sort of thing to do: We both want to be—free."

She put her hand in his—it was so small it reminded him of a child's—and then slipped away through a curtained door that led direct into the immense hall beyond.

4

In the next room bridge was still in progress, and such laconic words as "A heart," "Spade," "None," "Double," could be heard at intervals.

The departure of Vicky had been so swift and sudden—like the flight of a startled moth—that Soames had at first some difficulty in realizing that he was alone.

She had been quite decisive in her refusal. She wanted freedom—all the boys and girls were crying out for that now! Would it do them any good when they got it? Soames had been his own master since he was eighteen; he was therefore accustomed to consult only his personal convenience when anything had to be settled; he was an autocrat in his own house. He had slipped into his father's mould and had never wished to change anything. But this generation cried aloud for change. They refused to adapt themselves to any mould, they rejected almost without discrimination the ancient shibboleths. And could they not always answer: "Well, look what it's brought us to?" They were the ones who had suffered, who had gone through that fiery ordeal of sword and shell; it was useless to preach to them the desirability of a return to pre-war conditions and pre-war politics. They wanted a new heaven and a new earth. . . .

Soames knew that if he ever had children, they would have shrieked in vain for freedom. But Vicky belonged to another generation, and the trend of his thoughts showed him somewhat pitilessly the great gulf that divided them in these vital things. He would have had in so many ways to treat her like a child—a wild, beautiful child. And the training of her would have presented an almost insuperable difficulty. Many of her opinions were already formed; she knew what she desired of life, just perhaps the very things he would refuse to give her.

A sense of despair invaded his heart. She had said so little, but every word had seemed pregnant with meaning. He loved her, but even if she learnt in time to love him, would he ever be able to make her happy? Would she not always be like some lovely, wild thing, in a cage, beating its wings—crying aloud for liberty? . . .

Mortified and chilled by her words, he sat down by the fire, feeling unwilling, after his signal defeat, to return to the other room. Idly he picked up some illustrated papers—*Punch, Country Life,* the *Tatler.* In one of the latter he came across a charming photograph of Mrs. Gerard Hammond, the work of the latest fashionable photographer. She held in her arms her little son, Philip. A brief paragraph explained that before her marriage she had been the Honorable Barbara Wingrave, elder daughter of the first Lord Pendre, who was the owner of that beautiful property, Pendre Park, which he had purchased from the Chittenden family about twelve years ago. It was a fancy picture, very artificial and cleverly contrived, but it was charming too. There was something almost exaggeratedly maternal in Barbara's pose. But he told himself now with a certain bitterness that he had never cared passionately for her as he cared for this younger sister of hers. Vicky was at once child and woman, with an infinitely intriguing, alluring and tormenting personality.

He could almost imagine himself becoming her slave, yielding to her in all things, behaving, in short, like many elderly men who have married mere girls years younger than themselves.

But, then, he wasn't old. No one could call forty-two old! It was the prime of life. He was just as strong and fit as many a much younger man. He could do quite as long a day. But perhaps in the eyes of eighteen, forty-two did look slightly antediluvian!

"She hasn't had time to think it over," was the ultimate result of his meditation. "She's too much of a child, and then she's been frightfully repressed. I'd give her more freedom than that." He was just in the mood when, had she returned, he would have promised her anything and everything . . . just to win her. And it wasn't as if he hadn't a great deal—a very great deal—to offer. He was a richer man now than when he had proposed to Barbara. Lord Pendre had put him on to a thing or two that had turned up trumps. Vicky didn't seem, however, to have given a second thought to his wealth and property—things that would certainly have attracted a more worldly-minded girl.

Mummie and Eustie—these two, with an unnamed third person whose identity he could not even begin to guess—obviously filled her heart to the exclusion of all others. Especially Eustie. . . . He had himself been conscious of Eustace' charm to-night at dinner; there was something eager and ardent about him. He glanced at the bridge players, dimly visible to him at this distance. Eustace and his mother were playing together. Lady Pendre coldly lovely, very immobile. Eustace, with his pale narrow sensitive face, his deep-set burning eyes, the eyes of a poet, a visionary. One couldn't picture him devoting his life to the huge engineering works in the North, from which the Pendre fortunes were derived. Would they ever be able to make him fit into that hole? That overhanging brow of his was quite out of proportion to the rest of his face. There was something rather sweet and sensitive about the mouth. Soames had hardly ever spoken to Eustace, but he had known and liked Philip, and had been deeply grieved at his untimely death.

Of course, living in the same neighborhood, Ernest knew something of the endless gossip about the Wingraves—had heard that all Lord Pendre's hopes and nearly all his love had been concentrated upon that elder son, so that he had never pretended to care for Eustace, who was said to be in some ways "unsatisfactory."

Those two younger ones seemed to form a group apart. They clung together. And Lady Pendre, who had the name of being utterly cold and indifferent to her children, still counted for something in her young daughter's life. Mummie and Eustie. . . .

The game was just finished. Soames was invited to join, and Eustace, with a certain eagerness, offered him his place.

Lord Pendre poured out a whisky and soda for Soames and one for himself before the new rubber began. Eustace, who hated whisky and wondered why other men should be so continually thirsty, made his escape. He desperately longed to have a talk with Vicky before she went to bed. And he had an idea that to-night perhaps she would be waiting for him.

"Why doesn't Soames fall in love with Pamela?" he thought; "he must want a wife in that great house."

He ran upstairs, down a long passage, up another little flight of old crooked steps and into the schoolroom, a den he now shared with Vicky, and where even Pamela seldom ventured to interrupt them.

CHAPTER IX

The Shadow Deepens

1

THE schoolroom was in darkness except for the dying scarlet embers of a fire. In the obscurity Eustace could only just discern his sister leaning back in a big old-fashioned armchair, with her feet stretched out toward the ample hearth. She was still wearing that strange old-world dress of ivory velvet that looked as if it had been taken out of some ancient chest and dipped—as he fantastically thought—in moonlight.

She sprang up quickly and made a little rush toward him. He felt her two thin arms about his neck; they were very cold.

"Look out—don't choke me—" he said, struggling.

He fumbled for the electric light, but she stopped him.

"Oh, no, Eustie—it's much nicer talking like this. And there *is* enough light to swear by."

She rubbed her soft cheek against his.

Eustace sat down near her. He felt that she had some secret to divulge. Even at dinner-time she had looked oddly excited.

"Oh, Eustie, darling, did you know he was going to?"

"Going to? Who? What? What on earth are you talking about?"

He was frankly puzzled. What new surprise was she going to spring upon him?

"Mr. Soames—he wants to marry me! I can't imagine why, can you? I do hate having proposals, Eustace—unless of course—"

"Unless?—" Eustace lifted his brows.

But Vicky was wary.

"Unless it was someone I really wanted to marry."

Eustace knelt on the rug in front of the hearth and tried to coax the fire into renewed life. When he had succeeded in this task and had been rewarded by a thin spurt of flame, he went back to his seat, observing dryly:

"A woman may not marry her grandfather. I've seen it written up in the church porch!"

"Oh, I'm glad you think it was all right of me to refuse," said Vicky. "But I'm sure Dad must be awfully keen on it—they're such pals. I did so want to ask him why—what he saw in Dad to make such a tremendous friend of—but I was afraid of offending him. I expect they simply adore talking about that wretched bunker at the seventh hole!"

She screwed up her face till she looked like a lovely, malicious little witch.

"I'm very glad you refused him," remarked Eustace, lighting a cigarette and handing one to Vicky. "Wasn't he keen on Barbara once? 'How happy could I be with either!'" he quoted mockingly.

"Then you'll stick up for me, won't you, Eustie?"

"I always do, don't I? Even when you behave like a little devil let loose! He must be an awful ass, anyhow, to propose to a kid like you!"

"That's what I felt about it too. Still, it would have been a quick way of escape, wouldn't it? Away from the shadow. . . ." She put out her little cold hand and grasped one of his almost fiercely.

"No," he said, pressing her hand as if to reassure her. "Don't try to escape like that till the right man comes along. He's sure to, you know, Vicky—you looked simply topping to-night. You quite cut out poor old Pamela. I wonder he didn't go for her—he'd have had much more chance. You ought to have suggested it to him."

"Oh, I shouldn't have dared. He looked so terribly in earnest. But I did tell him we thought him an awful sport, and he took that all right!"

"Well, I hope some day that you and Martin'll fix it up. You are pretty keen on him, aren't you, Vicky?"

Vicky flushed. "Yes. I didn't realize how keen, somehow, till to-night. It would be awful, wouldn't it, to have to leave off loving Martin, just because one was going to marry a man one didn't care a hang about. But Dad's been so frightfully offensive to him, I expect he's quite choked off by now. Perhaps he's got another girl by this time—someone in Malta . . ."

"He can hardly have got there yet. Of course he may have met someone on the voyage out." Eustace had his own motive for teasing her; she was beginning to look so sad and hopeless. "And, anyhow, don't marry old Soames. Of course he's very rich, but then you've never cared for money." He grinned delightedly. "Somehow I can't picture you as Mrs. Soames!"

"Oh, Eustie, what a comfort you are to me!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "I don't know what I should do without you."

Presently, as they sat there, clinging to each other in silence, they heard a sound of wheels, of throbbing engines in the smooth, graveled drive below. They rose and groped their way across the room, and drew aside the blind. It was a cold clear night, and the March sky was scattered with brilliant frosty stars.

Then they saw the figure of a man emerge from the house and go quickly down the broad shallow steps. He stood there for a moment irresolutely, and glanced up at the windows. Vicky instinctively drew back into the shadow of the curtain. Then he stepped into the car; it moved away, increasing its speed, and was soon traveling rapidly down the long avenue, where the lime trees interlaced their still leafless brown boughs.

"He's gone," whispered Vicky, clutching her brother's arm. "Do you think he's told Dad? There'll be an awful shine to-morrow, if he has!"

Her words were careless enough, but her eyes had a quick bright look of fear in them that reminded him somehow of a snared bird's. In every nerve she feared her father, his power, his cruelty, his violence. The bitter lash of his tongue. His complete dominion over her. Would he force her into this marriage? Had it been of his own planning?

"Don't be a funk-stick," said Eustace, encouragingly.

"I'm a coward, Eustie. Perhaps I'd better marry Mr. Soames, after all!"

"It'ud be simply rotten, marrying someone you don't love," he observed, going back to the fire and throwing away the damp end of his cigarette.

As he spoke, a vision of Nella Tresham rose up before him. The loveliness of her . . .

"Yes. Look at Mummie," said Vicky, daringly.

She had never made this suggestion to anyone before. It startled and bewildered Eustace.

"Oh, Mum's all right," he assured her.

"She isn't! She's just a slave to all his whims and tantrums! Just as much a slave as we are. Only she couldn't escape if she wanted to."

"But she doesn't want to. I'm practically certain of that. She's devoted to him—even if sometimes he makes her suffer through us."

"She sent for me to-night before dinner and told me why Mr. Soames was coming," Vicky said; "she was frightfully sweet to me. She thought I'd better know beforehand that he wanted to marry me. She'd never talked to me like that before, Eustie—just as if I were *terribly* dear to her. It made me want to kneel at her feet."

"She couldn't have wished for it?" he hazarded.

"No. But she told me that Dad did."

"I'm glad she's on your side."

"Yes. I'd never felt sure of it before."

"By the way, Vicky, what did you think of all that story Soames told us to-night at dinner?"

"Told us?" Her thoughts were still too full of that interview she had had with him in the green drawing room; it seemed to have blotted out all lesser happenings.

"I mean about the chapel—where the lamp burned for five hundred years. Rather wonderful that!"

"And now we've made it into a ballroom," observed Vicky, scathingly. "To tell you the truth, Eustie, it made me feel a little bit ashamed."

"Did it?" He gave her a long close look. "I'm glad it did. It seems rather like sacrilege, and yet I suppose it wasn't really. Everything belonging to the chapel—that made it what it was—must have been removed long before. Before we ever came here."

His deep-set eyes burned with a strange fire.

"Let's go down there," suggested Vicky.

"Yes, let's."

2

They took a little electric torch and went down the few steps that led into a long passage. The whole house was hushed into a deep stillness. Probably Lady Pendre had gone to bed, and Pamela also. Lord Pendre generally sat up in his study to a very late hour, finishing the work left undone during the day. But his room was at the other end of the house; they would be little likely to disturb him.

They came at last to a narrow steep staircase. It was uncarpeted, and the boards creaked beneath their footsteps, almost protestingly. At the foot of this they entered upon the long wide little-used passage leading directly into the ballroom, which formed, as it were, a wing to itself. It had no rooms above it, but beyond it were two small ante-rooms which had probably been used in old days as a sacristy, and perhaps a priest's bedroom. There was also a door opening into the garden, probably for the use of the public who had come thither to worship, and to obviate the necessity of their going through the main building in order to reach the church.

Eustace and Vicky drew back the great bolts and opened the door. They switched on the electric light to obtain a better view of the magnificent room with its splendid carved ceiling, its shining parquet floor. Around the walls, delicately paneled now with carved gilt woodwork and gold damask silk, innumerable chairs and a few settees were somewhat formally arranged.

At the far end was a slightly raised platform, the floor of which was of finest parquet like that of the rest of the room. It was there, beyond a doubt, that the Altar had once stood through those long centuries of Catholic worship; it was there too, suspended from the delicately carved ceiling that the Lamp must have hung, burning before the Holy of Holies. . . .

Eustace went forward, not impulsively, but as if some superior force were driving him, against his own will and better judgment. He walked up to the first step of the raised platform—there were three in all—and knelt down. He did not pray, but his action was intended; he was making a wordless act of reparation. And as he knelt there a passionate longing to re-light that lamp, to fill the place again with the fragrant smoke of incense, to hear the solemn music, above all to watch the priest as he raised the Host once more before the kneeling throng of worshipers, came over him. He had only once been present at Mass, and that was many years before, when he was quite a little boy and his father had taken him with Phip and Barbara across to France for a few days. They had visited an ancient Gothic cathedral at an hour when High Mass was being sung, and he had purposely waited behind the others to watch what was going on. He had never forgotten it, nor the strange shining of the Host, that had seemed to gather to Itself all the light of that dim old cathedral. And then suddenly his father, perceiving his absence, had returned and dragged him quite angrily away. But because of that far-off unforgotten episode Eustace knew what would happen if Mass were to be said there once more. There would be lamps and incense, and music, and that mystic Host with Its wonderful limpid radiance that seemed to gather all lesser lights unto Itself . . .

As he knelt there he thought, too, of all the prayers and petitions that must have been uttered within those walls, all the entreaties, the thanksgivings, and that pure worship, too, that is known to theologians as the Prayer of Quiet, when the soul is in some sense released from the fret of human flesh and goes a little nearer to the Eternal in mystical flight.

He thought of the good people, the pious people, who had lived at Pendre through those five centuries, their habits and customs changing with the times, but their faith knowing no shadow of alteration. Their never-failing faith, their daily gathering perhaps before the Altar that had stood so near to where he was kneeling now! . . . It had all been swept ruthlessly away. But at that moment he felt that something of it *did* remain, informing and illuminating the place with a reflection of its ancient sanctity.

He rose at last and went toward Vicky, who was kneeling at the other end of the room near the door, her elbows placed upon a chair, her face hidden in her hands. He could only see the bowed, brown head with its dark mass of glossy hair brushed so closely. And as he looked at her, he felt a sudden almost intolerable pity for her. She must not marry Soames. He was conscious of a fierce indignation against his father because he had obviously encouraged the man in his wish to marry Vicky. It was a preposterous thought to try and arrange a marriage between them. If Vicky married, her husband must be of an age and disposition to give her every chance of happiness.

And his mother—what did she think of it? What thoughts had filled her mind to-night, while her lovely face was bending meditatively above the cards in which she was apparently so absorbed? But she could not possibly carry her habitual cold and aloof detachment to the point of seeing her own child sacrificed, without making the slightest effort to save her from a fate that could only be productive of misery. She could not yield submissively to her husband's will in such a matter as this.

And suddenly, irrelevantly, he thought of those words, surely of deep and tragic remorse, which she had permitted to escape her in the hour when she had first learned of her son's death. *It was I who killed him.* . . . Eustace did not attempt to probe the inner meaning of those words, wrung from her by the sharpness of her suffering. He even shrank from analyzing them too closely. But they taught him that his mother must at some time or other, previous to that hour, have suffered very severely; she had blamed herself bitterly for something she had done or left undone. There must have been something wanting even in her tender love for Philip. But what it was—what she had done to slay him, body or soul—Eustace could hazard no guess. Indeed he preferred not to think about it. It seemed part of the mystery, the shadow. . . .

He walked softly up and down the long length of the room, his feet making little sound on the polished floor. The place seemed to him full of haunting presences, of reproachful ghosts. When he again reached Vicky's kneeling figure, he stopped as if half afraid to disturb her. She too was sensitive—she could hardly be unaware of the atmosphere that still informed the place. Then he saw, to his consternation, that her shoulders were shaking convulsively. She was crying. Deep suppressed sobs shook her slight frame, agonizingly.

"Vicky—Vicky darling—come up to bed," he whispered, soothingly.

He felt now that it was a mistake to have brought her hither to-night, in her over-wrought, excited condition.

She raised her face, wet and stained with tears.

"They were happier than we are, those Chittendens," she said, in a choked voice. "They had—God. And we have only the shadow."

The shadow. . . .

There was a kind of despair in her voice, that filled Eustace with a curious morbid sense of uneasiness.

They had God . . . we have only the shadow. . . .

She rose to her feet. Her face was deathly pale, her eyes were bright with fear. They stood face to face, almost horror-stricken.

"It isn't only because the lamp has been extinguished," she whispered. "It's something far worse than that. Some deliberate insult offered. One of us," her voice dropped, almost as if she were afraid of being overheard by those invisible, reproachful presences—"one of us must be fighting against God. . . ."

Eustace made a gigantic effort not to permit himself to be influenced by her words. Her thoughts were, as his mother had said, often wildly, morbidly imaginative. He knew, too, that he ought to have checked them. But he had no word of comfort to offer. What she felt, he was feeling, only perhaps more definitely, more emphatically. There *was* something, and in their helpless endeavor to discover its nature, they seemed to be beating their pigmy ineffectual hands against a barrier of formless, invisible, but substantial quality. . . . Something that in its very strength resisted them.

3

He put his arm round his sister, switched off the electric light, and with the aid of the torch groped his way out of the room. She seemed to follow him quite mechanically, as, after locking and bolting the door, he quietly led her along the passage up to the narrow uncarpeted stairs. He reproached himself for having encouraged her in the expedition at such a moment. Her mood, sensitive and attuned to new impressions, had made her react almost violently to the atmosphere of the chapel. And it had made her suffer, just as it had made him suffer.

He did not leave her until she was perfectly calm and inclined to be sleepy. Then he kissed her good-night and went to his own room. For a long time he sat there in deepest thought, trying vainly to unravel the mystery. But it was without clue; no ray of light penetrated across its darkness.

They had God. . . . Vicky's speech rang uncomfortably in his ears. But it was quite true. Something had passed away from Pendre, something of perdurable beauty and sanctity. And perhaps the very stones were crying out, in dismay and reproach. The ballroom was surely symbolic of the change that had overtaken the old house. But to Eustace the metamorphosis held a far deeper significance. When he recalled his father's angry words at dinner, he could not believe that the change had been accomplished in a spirit of careless ignorance. Perhaps there had been mixed up with it the intention to insult deliberately all that had gone before. An insult, determined and premeditated, offered to the Catholic Church, of which the chapel at Pendre was only a small and humble adjunct.

Mingled with Lord Pendre's contempt and unbelief there was also a measure of hatred. Hatred . . . but based upon what? To this question there seemed to be no adequate answer; it only formed perhaps part of the mystery whose shadow enveloped Pendre.

Eustace opened his window and looked out upon the still, starry night. The fields were pale in the moonlight, and the sea beyond was faintly touched to polished argent. He could hear its rhythmic, sustained beating, like a mighty pulse.

"If I ever inherit Pendre," he said aloud, "whether I'm a Catholic or not, I shall have a chapel here. And if they'll let me I'll light the lamp again . . ."

His lips closed firmly upon the words, and his whole face was set and stern with resolution.

He remembered the impression he had had so strongly on the evening of his return—that Pendre was asking something of him. Perhaps it was just this thing. . . . Perhaps he would not be permitted to escape all responsibility, to surrender his birthright. Pendre was pleading to him for the revival of that spiritual life that once had pulsed within its walls.

There would be no space for shadows, surely, when the All Holy was once more beneath the roof at Pendre.

4

Vicky passed a restless night, and when she awoke on the following morning it was with a sense of impending disaster, that seemed to have both informed and emanated from her uneasy dreams.

Of course there would be a scene about Ernest Soames—that was her first thought. Her father wouldn't be likely to let the matter rest there. He would use every effort to bring her to reason. She would require all her courage to resist him. And it was unlikely that such an interview would end without some mention of Martin's name. She would have to hear once more Lord Pendre's exact opinion of him.

Of course, she could rely upon Eustace' support; he was as definitely opposed to the marriage as she was. Her mother was perhaps little likely to offer her any sensible assistance. She had never in her life taken her children's part against her husband; it was improbable that she would do so now. Still, it was something to feel certain that she, too, disliked the idea. . . .

Vicky dressed herself and went down to breakfast. Her face was pale, and her eyes were rimmed with dark purple stains; she still bore the traces of those violent and successive emotions to which she had been the prey last night. That touching scene with her mother—the interview with Mr. Soames—those terrible moments in the ballroom with Eustace! . . . She felt that they were imprinted upon her heart so sharply that they had left her raw and wounded.

When she entered the dining-room her father and mother and Pamela were already seated at the table. Eustace had not as yet appeared. Since his return home he had been granted a certain indulgence about coming down in the morning, for it was considered that he was in need of additional rest. Lord Pendre was extremely particular about punctuality at breakfast, and indeed at all meals. He disliked any suggestion of slackness, and there was nothing quite so slack as the habit of getting up late. He had never been slack himself, and to this he attributed his continually increasing prosperity and success.

It was also distinctly understood that this latitude accorded to Eustace was only to be of temporary duration. Already his father was beginning to wonder whether he wasn't taking advantage of what had been intended only as a brief privilege. . . . But whenever he considered this matter of Eustace, Lord Pendre felt aggrieved. A few months' holiday to be spent in travel, he should have if necessary, and after that he must be made to see that his future prospects depended entirely upon his own exertions. Philip's post in the great engineering works of Wingrave and Co., was waiting for him, and if he did not prove to be an utter fool he would certainly avail himself of the opportunity it offered.

But there it was—! He could never regard Eustace with the smallest sense of security. There was something elusive about him—you could never pin him down. He was dissatisfied, discontented, and he had come back from the War worse in these respects than when he went. All this talk of freedom—of not caring for money! But as long as his children were living under his roof, enjoying all that it could offer of comfort and luxury, Lord Pendre was resolved that they should obey him. No one had their material welfare so deeply at heart as he had, he could truthfully assure himself. And it seemed so little to ask in return for all that he was able to give them, that they should submit to his will in exterior things. Nothing unjust or arbitrary about that! In the old days—which he frankly regretted—parents extorted submission because they were parents and for no other reason. But times had changed—in the last fifty years they had changed very much for the worse. And in the last decade the process had become alarming, viewed from the parents' standpoint. Children were beginning to demand things as their right. Girls too as well as boys. He had always known what this giving of the vote to women would lead to. . . .

It was at this unfortunate point in his morning meditation that Vicky entered the room. Her pale worn face had a sullen and defiant expression, as if she were prepared for the remonstrance that surely awaited her. This annoyed Lord Pendre, who expected to be greeted with cheery affection by his children, no matter what happened.

Vicky said good-morning, kissed both her parents a trifle perfunctorily, nodded carelessly to Pamela, and took her seat at the table.

Although she was at least five minutes late, nothing had been said. That meant that Lord Pendre was storing up all his eloquence for the scene that must presently follow. His brow was black as a thunder-cloud; it was strange that when he was angry he looked always so much darker and more swarthy than he did at other times.

What had Soames said to him? He had not seemed very easy to convince, and he might well have considered her reply as by no means final. Too young to know her own mind! Nor was Lord Pendre one to be easily persuaded that a game he had set his heart upon winning was lost.

When he looked at her his exasperation rapidly increased. That mixture of defiant audacity and servile fear that characterized her attitude toward him invariably aroused the bully within him. Well, she had still to learn that he intended this marriage should take place. The *cons* she might seek for herself, the *pros* she would learn from his lips before the day was much older. A little slip of a thing like that to defy him! But although she had often defied him in the course of her short life, he had always ultimately been able to secure her submission. She had had, it is true, that fierce passionate nature which often bestows upon a child a fictitious courage, combined with an indifference to consequences, apparently foolhardy. He could remember her almost like a little Ismael in her nursery days, her hand against everyone. And although with the passing of years she had grown more subdued and timid and outwardly amenable, the defiant passionate spirit was still there, ready at any moment to manifest itself in an endeavor to thwart his pet projects. . . .

"When you've finished your breakfast come into the study, Vicky. I wish to speak to you," he said, rising from his seat. In his great powerful hands, with their coarse spatulate fingers, he carried a local newspaper and a great heap of still unopened letters.

"Very well, Dad," she answered, in a subdued nervous tone.

Pamela, sitting opposite to her, gave her a glance in which envy and a certain triumph were subtly intermingled.

She was still in ignorance as to last night's happenings, but she had arrived within measurable distance of the truth. She had not been blind, for instance, to that private talk Vicky had had with Ernest Soames after dinner in the green drawing-room. And Vicky had presently slipped away by another door, leaving him discourteously alone. There must have been some reason for that. When he had rejoined them, taking Eustace' place at the bridge-table, he had seemed completely abstracted and ill at ease, like a man upon whom some dire and unexpected misfortune has recently descended.

It had compelled Pamela to face the unwelcome truth—Soames had proposed to Vicky and had been refused. Nothing else could possibly account for the fact that he revoked three times in the course of the evening, for normally he was a sound if not a brilliant player. Pamela had had her own conjectures on the subjects of his increasedly frequent visits to Pendre, and now that she saw her error she felt annoyed with Vicky for having flung aside this prize carelessly, with such disdain. Not for the third time would Mr. Soames be likely to seek a bride at Pendre. . . .

Pamela was not in the least degree in love with him; she would have greatly preferred to marry Eustace Wingrave, and she felt convinced that such a marriage would have had the full approbation of his father if not of his mother. Besides, it was what everyone had been expecting. But Eustace, during his few weeks at home, had not only shown himself perfectly indifferent to her, but had also consistently avoided her as if he was obscurely aware of all that was passing in their minds and was determined to frustrate such extravagant hopes. Pamela had felt the situation to be a little humiliating. It was aggravated by the antagonism of Vicky. Sometimes she had even felt that Vicky was influencing Eustace against her. Since Barbara's departure, Eustace and Vicky had been practically inseparable. Pamela had not hitherto realized this immense devotion, and it annoyed her, for she felt that the powerful alliance was in some sense arrayed against herself. It had made her turn her thoughts with a new resolution toward Moth Hill. She had always liked Soames, had found him kindly and sympathetic, and sometimes she had thought, too, that he was beginning to like her and would probably end by inviting her to be his wife. Moth Hill was a very desirable property, and in marrying Soames, Pamela felt that she would have regained much that she had forfeited at Philip's death. Always ambitious, she was inclined to use her loss as a stepping-stone if not to higher things, at any rate to those not too far below them in such matters as wealth and position. It gave her, as she was aware, a certain value and significance.

But to see Soames snatched away before her very eyes by that silly and despicable child, Vicky, was altogether too bitter a pill for her to swallow. Last night she had almost decided to go home on a visit—it was such a long time since she had seen her father. He was an absent-minded scholar, who, however, never noticed whether she were in the house or not. He was wont to spend his days either in his study, poring over musty books, or in his laboratory, making strange experiments—of what nature no one knew. There were such hordes of children too—lanky girls and insolent rough boys. Pamela shuddered at the prospect. The little narrow house in West Kensington, with its soot-blackened garden forming a strip back and front of the building, was by no means a delectable abode, and after the luxury of Pendre she felt that she could endure it with less fortitude even than of old.

Her father was a man of distinguished family, and her mother had been a daughter of the late Sir Somerville Mason, a noted parliamentarian of the mid-Victorian epoch. But at her death, Mr. Webb had felt the urgent need of a housekeeper, someone to look after things, to direct the servants, and procure him immunity from domestic disturbances, and he had married a woman, who, he felt, could safely be entrusted with these simple tasks. But the profusion of children—the two eldest were twin girls—had rendered Mrs. Webb's existence a by no means easy one, given the restricted nature of her husband's income, and his firm refusal to leave the house in West Kensington for a more spacious abode. In the struggle that had ensued, Pamela had found herself more and more neglected, and a tacit antagonism sprang up between her and her stepmother and the children, that claimed all her care and attention. Fortunately when she was about seventeen, Lady Farrant, a rich and prosperous sister of the late Sir Somerville remembered her great-niece's existence and rescued her from what seemed to her, highly undesirable surroundings. Mr. Webb acquiesced in the plan without demur; he only wished that it had been possible for the twins to go too. But Lady Farrant's philanthropy did not extend further than Pamela, and it was under her irreproachable aegis that the girl had first met Philip Wingrave. She had died during the War, surviving Philip but a short time; still, she felt happy about Pamela, being satisfied that the Pendres had in a sense adopted her.

5

While Pamela was thus sullenly considering the feasibility of a descent upon the only house she had a right to enter, Lady Pendre turned to Vicky and said nervously:

"I really think you'd better not keep your father waiting much longer—he won't like it, and I know he's very busy to-day."

Vicky had been lingering purposely over her breakfast, sipping her coffee and crumbling her toast, with an evident desire to postpone the unpleasant interview for as long as possible. She was not in the least hungry—indeed there was a lump in her throat that made it almost impossible for her to swallow, a legacy of last night's emotion and weeping.

She rose at last with a face of stone. Her mother was right—it was worse than useless to keep him waiting. She went slowly out of the room, and Lady Pendre's eyes followed her wistfully.

Pamela ventured to say:

"What on earth's the matter with Vicky?"

She often felt how perfect it would be at Pendre without Vicky, her temper, her tendency to sulk.

Lady Pendre waited for a moment and then said:

"Ernest Soames asked her to marry him last night. She—she refused him."

Her dark eyes rested full upon Pamela's face. She had wanted an opportunity for informing her of the event, having been intuitively aware of the trend of the girl's hopes, which she had even been conscious at one time of sharing.

It was kinder to let her know the truth as soon as possible. Pamela's face, however, was very calm, and gave no hint of disappointment. Only it became more and more clear to her that she was wasting her time, the precious years of youth, here at Pendre. . . .

"My husband is very anxious for the marriage to take place," pursued Lady Pendre. "Mr. Soames, it seems, spoke to him last week. I didn't think myself he would have much chance—Vicky is such a child."

"And then she's in love with Martin Sedgwick," observed Miss Webb. "Fa will never give his consent to that. Still, Mr. Soames is ever so much too old for her—I don't think he could have made a more unsuitable choice. She is such a child, as you say—hardly out of the schoolroom—and young for her years."

"In some ways, not in all," Lady Pendre corrected gently.

"Perhaps Fa will be able to make her see the error of her ways," said Pamela, with a little laugh. "What does Eustace think of it?"

"I don't know. I haven't spoken to him about it. But I'm quite sure he wouldn't like the idea—he'd think as I do, that there's far too great a disparity between their ages. Twenty-two years at least, perhaps a year or two more. Ernest is over forty."

Pamela wondered why "Fa" hadn't told her about the affair. It showed a slight lack of confidence, for she was pleasantly aware that he did discuss most things with her, and even paid her the compliment of listening courteously to her opinion or advice. But perhaps he had discerned the fact that she was Vicky's unconscious rival, and had not liked to give this damaging touch to her secret hopes. This explanation wounded Pamela's pride sharply. Her wish to marry Soames was utterly untinged by any sentimentality; it was actuated by pure worldly ambition.

Lady Pendre sat there nervously, wishing that Eustace would come down. She did not dare go into the study, for her husband had told her that he wished to talk to Vicky quite alone. She wondered what he was saying to her—how he was saying it. His anger always terrified the girl. Lady Pendre sometimes thought that the violence he had used toward her as a little child had permanently affected her nerves.

Eustace came into the room.

"Good-morning, Mother. Good-morning, Pamela. Where's Vicky?"

"She's finished her breakfast. Your father's talking to her in the study."

"Whew-w," the sound escaped from his pursed lips. "Why aren't you there too, then, Mother darling, to look after your little daughter's interests?"

His tone was mocking, but his eyes were very serious, and as they rested upon her face, Lady Pendre fancied that they held their old accusing, condemnatory look.

"He didn't want me to be there. He wished to see her quite alone."

Pamela looked at him reproachfully.

"You speak as if Fa were bullying Vicky when he's only thinking of her—her welfare."

"I expect you know Fa better than I do, Pamela," Eustace assured her, gravely.

"Well, you can hardly deny that Vicky's been awfully troublesome lately."

"I admit it's most unreasonable of her to want to marry a man she really cares for, and to refuse to marry one she doesn't even pretend to like. If she'd had half an eye to the main chance, she would have jumped at Soames' offer." There was a morose irony in his tone.

Lady Pendre looked imploringly from one to the other. They seemed armed for conflict this morning.

"Do please go to Vicky, Mother," said Eustace, growing nervous.

When he had crossed the hall just now he had heard a loud angry voice emanating from his father's study. Probably the secretary or agent had done something to offend—Lord

Pendre never passed over the least slip in silence. If you did, he was wont to allege, you would never get efficiency from those who served you. But now that Eustace knew Vicky was the object of his present wrath, he felt that he could bear it no longer.

Lady Pendre made a slight movement as if to rise, then thinking better of it she allowed the impulse to pass. Eustace was exasperated by his mother's timidity. Why didn't she go and insist upon defending her own child? Why did she continue to sit there, pale, immovable, detached, just as if she had no right to interfere? . . .

He rose abruptly from his seat. "For if you don't, I must!" he exclaimed, with angry determination. "It really isn't fair to Vicky!"

He made a swift movement toward the door. But before he could reach it his mother stopped him.

"No dear," she said with unusual resolution, "you'd only make things worse. I'll go myself."

He held the door open while she passed out. He saw her cross the hall with slow, firm tread and disappear into the study.

Then he closed the door and returned to his seat, going on with his breakfast as if nothing had happened.

He wished that Pamela would go away. There she sat, not speaking, secretly condemning him. Of course she was beautiful with her white face—the warm whiteness of a magnolia bloom not the pallor of anaemia,—the gold of her hair, her fine dark blue eyes. Having so much, why could she not leave poor Vicky alone? There was really no need for anyone as beautiful as that to be jealous.

"Why did you encourage Lady Pendre to go?" she said presently. "Fa knows exactly how to deal with Vicky—he's had lots of experience during the past seventeen years. I'm sure she was difficult to manage even in her cradle."

Eustace' glance was keen; it seemed to pierce her. His answer flicked her like a whip.

"I always wonder what Vicky can possibly have done to you, Pamela?" he said coolly.

Their eyes met, full of challenge, as if now they were acknowledged combatants.

Pamela did not reply; she rose hastily and went out of the room. She wanted to escape from that cool glance that seemed to read the secrets of her heart—that voice that scourged her with its deliberate irony.

CHAPTER X

Conflict

1

LORD PENDRE was in one of his fierce white-hot rages that had always hitherto had the effect of terrifying Vicky into yielding to any or all of his wishes. But this morning she found that issues of a far wider and greater importance than any mere wish for renewed peace were involved. And never had Martin meant so much to her. It is true that during the last eighteen months she had only seen him once for a very brief period, while her original affection for him had owed its existence to a kind of childish hero-worship, still he represented unalterably a type and standard by which other men could be measured, and found wanting.

Only to picture him side by side with Soames, sufficed to reduce the latter's claim to consideration to vanishing-point. And something, too, in Martin's so recently avowed love seemed to support her now and give her a new courage.

If she had been convinced last night that in no circumstances could she marry Soames, she was doubly certain this morning of the impossibility of so doing. She didn't even like him, and now she felt something almost akin to hatred of him because he had brought this trouble upon her.

"So you had the impertinence to tell Soames last night that you wouldn't marry him?" was Lord Pendre's first question as she entered the study that morning.

Vicky, in a very short serge skirt, a brilliant jumper that made her body look more skimpy and childish than usual, and with her dark bobbed hair, seemed to have shed at least three of her eighteen years.

"Yes, Dad." Her voice was steady. After all, they couldn't force her into this marriage. Things like that *couldn't* happen. . . .

He gazed at her scornfully.

"It doesn't signify, however," he continued. "I can easily explain it to him. I wish this marriage to take place." He stared at her with his hard black compelling eyes, that almost hypnotized her into unwilling submission.

Vicky's courage seemed to diminish. When he said: "I wish this marriage to take place," her heart sank into her boots. She hated scenes, although when she was a child she had sometimes deliberately provoked them for the dreadful excitement they gave her, but now they only terrified and exhausted her.

She had always ultimately obeyed her father. His methods of coercion could be almost beyond human resistance. His coarse, cruel hands had often in the past struck her to the earth; she could seldom look at them now without remembering their fierce power; the very sight and touch of them made her flesh shrink in fear.

If only her mother or Eustace would come into the room! . . .

"I'm not going to marry him," she said, with sudden decision. "I don't like him. I'm not going to marry anyone for ages—you can tell him that. But when I do, it won't be Mr. Soames."

"You are talking like a baby. Soames has fifteen thousand a year. Possibly even more. You've no right to refuse such an offer as that."

"Barbara wouldn't have him. Why should I?" Vicky raised large, innocent, rather reproachful, eyes to her father's face. "Of course, I do see you'd think it would be a perfectly splendid thing for me to be Mrs. Soames." Some hint of her old audacity was visible now, although her lips trembled. "To live at Moth Hill and have all that money! But I hate money—I don't want it. Nor does Eustie!" She flung the words at her father with a dreadful defiance.

"You have always been perverse. But I think you would both speak rather differently if you were to try poverty for a few months. You've never had to do without anything in your life."

"Eustie has, though, and it made no difference to him."

Lord Pendre's wrath was beginning to rise at this exhibition of cool impertinence, but so far he had himself pretty well in hand.

"You're never likely to have such a chance as that again. Men with fifteen thousand a year aren't to be met with every day, I can tell you. And personally I've a great regard for Soames. He'll make you an excellent husband—if anyone can keep you in order, he will!"

"I'm not surprised at your liking him—he's much nearer your age than he is mine," replied Vicky. "And then there are lots of ways in which you're terribly alike!"

Lord Pendre was aware that no compliment was intended either to himself or to the absent Soames. He longed to box his daughter's ears soundly for that piece of cheek.

"Anyhow, I mean to choose my own husband, and it won't be Ernest Soames!" she declared now with vehemence.

She was flushed, nervous and excited. Painfully afraid of him, too, across all that surface defiance.

"If you're thinking of Sedgwick—!" he stormed.

"Well, I am, if you want to know!"

"You shall never see him again. You shall marry Soames this summer. I mean to be obeyed." He raised his voice angrily.

"I'll run away from home first," cried Vicky.

He advanced threateningly. "Don't let me hear any d——d folly of that kind or I'll have you watched night and day!"

Subconsciously she believed that he would win the day. He had always come off victor in their many conflicts, and the smart of those remembered past defeats diminished her courage now. Was it any use opposing him? He looked so formidably strong with those great shoulders, those massive limbs, those cruel powerful hands. His face was thunderously black, and the broad black brows met in a straight line across his forehead.

Suddenly, to his dismay, she broke down and began to weep. It was a long time since he had seen her in tears, but the sight only served still further to irritate him.

"Don't cry—it's absurd at your age to behave like a baby. Run away from home indeed! You wouldn't like it much when you were found and brought back, I can tell you! You seem to forget that you're eighteen—I shall forget it myself in another moment, and treat you as if you were the baby you pretend to be!"

She clutched at the nearest table, sobbing and trembling. The menace in his look, in his words, terrified her.

"In this matter I'm going to insist upon your obeying me. I know best what's for your good. I'm not going to let you throw away the best chance of a desirable settlement you're ever likely to have, just for a childish whim! I shall write to Soames this morning."

"It's no use your writing to him—I shall send a note by Eustie to tell him that he isn't to believe one word you say."

Mutiny crimsoned her face—she looked strangely alive. Lord Pendre advanced toward her with uplifted hand. She shrank away from him, closing her eyes so that she might not watch the blow fall. She clenched her hands, awaiting it. . . .

It was at this critical moment that her mother came into the room. Lord Pendre's arm dropped to his side. Vicky looked up, scarcely able to believe that salvation had come thus in the nick of time. She gave a great audible sob of relief. . . .

Lady Pendre advanced a step or two into the room, and stood there watching them. In her plain black morning dress she looked very tall and slender. Her eyes were fixed upon Vicky, pale, trembling, defeated. Perhaps this would be the last of these ceaseless duels between the father and daughter. Never had two people understood each other so little, and indeed made so little effort to understand each other.

Lady Pendre had suffered many things at the hands of her own father; she had endured anxiety and humiliation on his account, but she had never been unmindful of his good points, and she had always regarded him as a friend. A friend who might strain her loyalty to breaking-point, but still a friend. Sometimes, too, he had been more like a loving, dependent remorseful child than a father. But to his weak rather dissolute nature cruelty had been unknown.

Vicky crept a step nearer to her mother.

"Girls don't marry in these days unless they want to," she said, drying her eyes and gaining a fresh access of courage from Lady Pendre's welcome and unexpected presence. "I'm sure when Mummie married you, she didn't do it because her father told her to!" She turned appealingly to her mother. "Did you, Mummie?" she asked.

There was a dead silence, the more emphatic because just a moment before, the room had seemed so filled with shrill and angry sounds. And during that silence Vicky was aware that she had both hurt and wounded her mother, that she had touched perhaps some ancient sore.

Lady Pendre winced slightly, and then walked across to the window, so that now her back was turned to both the protagonists. She held herself very still and said nothing. But the girl was insistent. She broke past her father, who tried to seize and detain her, and ran up to her mother with an eager confidence, born perhaps of that new worshiping love. "Did you? You *must* tell me! . . ."

Then she felt herself roughly and violently seized with brutal strength. Lord Pendre gripped her arm with a hand that was like an iron vise. He flung her savagely aside. She lost her balance and fell against a table, slipping to the ground. There was a little wound in her forehead where her head had struck the sharp point of the table. For a moment she could hardly see for pain, the room seemed full of tiny diamond-like sparks of dazzling light. The suddenness and violence of his gesture had deprived her of all means of resistance. She struggled to her feet somehow, her hand pressed to her head, the blood trickling down in a thin stream between her fingers.

She stood there pale, trembling, bewildered, more afraid of him than she had ever been. Yet, what had she done to deserve this fierce attack? What had she said to provoke him to this extremity of violence?

"How dare you ask your mother such a question as that? How dare you?" His face, almost livid with fury, was close to hers; his self-control had utterly broken down. "I forbid you to speak like that! Do you hear me?"

She was far too much cowed and terrified to answer him. But dimly, through all the fear and pain, she knew that she had inadvertently touched upon some unpalatable truth. Involuntarily . . . for her question had been a mere arrow in the dark. Had it struck them both, piercing some ancient wound? Was it true, then, that her mother had been forced into this marriage? She had never spoken to her children, as happy women often will, of that first meeting with the man who was destined to become her husband—of the wonderful days of their engagement, when all things had seemed so good and fair and full of promise . . . No, they had only been vaguely aware that their parents' marriage had taken place abroad, very quietly, owing to Major Kelsey's health. Their grandfather had not survived his daughter's marriage many months. That was all they knew of the affair, and Vicky, like the others, had accepted her mother's silence and reticence on the subject without question. Lady Pendre had never been in the habit of speaking of her past life to her children, and her reserve made approach difficult.

She had watched the little scene with a secret anguish. But now, seeing the blood flow from her child's forehead, she ran up to her, and began to staunch the wound with her handkerchief. She made her lie on the sofa and put a cushion under her head.

The girl was sobbing now; she was past speaking. But she gazed beyond her mother at her father, with terrified, hypnotized eyes. He moved a step toward her, perhaps to ascertain if the wound were a deep one. But Vicky put up her hands before her face and shrieked hysterically.

"No—no—let me go away—I don't want to stay here! Let me go away and teach or type—I'm sure I can earn my own living. I shan't be any expense—only let me go away!"

Beneath Lady Pendre's skilful fingers the bleeding had now stopped and Vicky's forehead was bound up. The cut was just above her right eyebrow.

"Don't be a fool!" said her father impatiently. "You're going to stay here, and the sooner you come to your senses the better for your own sake. This is April—your marriage shall take place in July. That'll give you lots of time in which to get accustomed to the idea and to buy your things. Soames knows perfectly well that what you said last night doesn't count. I had a talk with him before he went away. He saw that you were very young and extraordinarily silly for your age. I must confess, though, that I never thought you'd do us so little credit after all we've spent on your education."

"Do leave her alone, Hugo. The child's hurt," said Lady Pendre, in a low, urgent tone.

"My dear—a little bruise! That won't hurt her—"

"Mummie—say it isn't true—say I needn't marry him—" wept Vicky.

Lady Pendre was silent. Once she opened her lips as if she were about to speak, but long habit prevailed and no words came. She made no response either by word or sign to her daughter's passionate appeal. Her face betrayed neither suffering nor emotion; it was a beautiful passionless mask. But she continued to kneel there beside Vicky.

"Mummie—speak to me! Tell me it isn't true. . . ."

Lady Pendre rose to her feet.

"Vicky, darling, are you better? Do you think you could come up to your room?"

"Yes—yes." She longed to feel herself safely behind closed doors, away from the sight of that dark, almost livid, face.

"She shall not go till I give her leave!"

"Hugo—it's no use tormenting her. And you have hurt her. You might have hurt her very much. You forget how strong you are—"

She helped Vicky to her feet, and led her out of the room.

Lord Pendre watched them, his great arms folded across his massive chest. He wondered idly, as the door closed behind them, what they were saying to each other.

2

It seemed to Vicky as she went out of the room, her hand still clinging desparately to her mother's, that the shadow followed them, enveloping them both. And to her heated and morbidly active imagination it appeared that her mother was also aware of it, and would have placed her beyond the reach of it had she been able to do so.

There was something in Lady Pendre's silent presence that soothed and comforted her, giving her a sense of safety.

Her forehead still smarted from the cut, and her head ached with a dull, heavy pain. Her eyes were all swollen and reddened with tears. If Martin could see her now! . . . She had a sudden longing that he should know how miserable she was.

Lady Pendre took her up to her room, bathed her forehead again with cold water, and made her lie on the bed. She pulled down the blinds, and then, bending over her, kissed her.

"I'm very sorry, Vicky dear. I only wish you'd try not to irritate your father. He has a violent temper, and he doesn't realize how strong he is."

Vicky put her two thin arms around her mother's neck.

"But you wouldn't let me marry Mr. Soames, would you, Mummie? I know I shall run away—do something desperate—if he insists."

"I am quite, quite sure that he can't make you marry Mr. Soames or anyone else if you don't wish to. It isn't your duty to obey him in this, Vicky."

"Mummie, darling, don't go. Stay with me."

"Only for a little while, then, Vicky."

"I feel safe when you're there."

Vicky stretched out her hand and held her mother's in a close, firm clasp.

She felt thoroughly spent and exhausted, but she was quite calm again, that dreadful sobbing had ceased, and she was even able to review the terrible little scene with equanimity. Her father had frightened her—his loud angry voice had always terrified her—and at one moment she had almost believed in his actual power to force her into this hateful marriage. But now, lying there quietly with her mother's hand in hers, she began to see the absurdity of her own fears. Eustace would never permit such a thing as that to happen. He would take her away from Pendre, if necessary, out of all danger. The thought of Eustace was strangely comforting and reassuring. She could depend upon him utterly. He wasn't afraid. . . . There was something solidly helpful about him.

If only her head didn't ache so—it prevented her from thinking consecutively. Eustace and Martin were all mixed up in her thoughts. When she thought of Eustie it was Martin's face that rose up before her, fair-haired, blue-eyed, wonderful. . . .

Martin wouldn't, surely, allow her to be forced into an uncongenial marriage. Why, he had even been a little afraid of Soames—a little jealous of him. He needn't have been. But perhaps he had foreseen that Soames would want to marry her.

Martin . . . He was there now, coming up the hill toward the Pendre woods, his face flushed with exercise and excitement. His arms were outstretched, she was going forward almost blindly to feel herself clasped by them. All the rest of the world seemed to melt away. There were only herself and Martin. . . . He was the incarnation of eager youth . . . and he loved her.

She moved restlessly. Then presently, as her mother watched her, she fell asleep.

Lady Pendre waited a little longer, then she stole noiselessly from the room.

3

A light tap at the door aroused Vicky from her slumbers. She looked round, discovering somewhat to her alarm that she was alone. Her mother had gone. She must have fallen asleep. A clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve. Why, it was nearly two hours since she had come up to lie down.

"Come in," she called.

Eustace appeared on the threshold. He came softly toward her. His face fell a little as he observed her bandaged head. All that was visible of her face beneath the white bandage looked piteously small and ashen pale.

"But, my darling Vicky—you don't mean to tell me that there's been actual bloodshed!" he said.

Despite his light mocking tone, his deep-set eyes showed a gleam of fierce anger.

"He knocked me down and I cut my forehead against the table," said Vicky, succinctly. "I hope I shan't have a beastly scar to remind me of his murderous wrath."

"I hope not, indeed." He took a chair and sat by her bedside.

"Eustie—"

"Yes?"

"You'd always be on my side, wouldn't you? Even about Martin?"

"Of course I would."

"You'd take me away from here if it was necessary?"

"Rather!"

His curt voice fell on her ears like music.

"Eustie—I do love you—better than anyone except Mummie and Martin. And I'm not sure which of you three I like best."

He was touched by this artless confidence.

"Well, tell me, was there an awful shine?" His eyes twinkled beneath the pent-house brows.

"Oh, fearful—the worst there's ever been. Far, *far* worse than when I met Martin. I really thought he was going to kill me. But it's no laughing matter, Eustie—he means to insist upon my marrying Ernest Soames—he won't *let* me throw away fifteen thousand a year!"

She was smiling now, but her voice had a queer tremor in it.

"Rot!—He can't make you," said Eustace, with conviction. "No one can be forced into marriage in these days. So you were rather a little ass to make a fuss, my dear child."

"Was I? But he always gets his own way. I *know* he'll win in the end, you see. Perhaps I'd better give in for the sake of peace."

Eustace put his hands on her thin sharp little shoulders and gave her a tiny shake.

"Vicky!"

"Yes?"

"You're not to talk like that! Do you hear?"

She roused herself with an effort. Eustace was very kind, very cheering and hopeful, but he didn't realize how utterly tired and exhausted she was. Fatigue had produced a kind of hypnotic calm; he thought he had never seen her look so little perturbed, so resigned.

She opened her eyes languidly.

"When you were in the thick of the fighting, Eustie—perhaps when you'd been at it all day long—didn't you ever feel inclined to surrender, just because you were so frightfully tired, and you knew you must be killed or defeated in the end?" she asked.

"No—I never wanted to do such a fool thing as that," answered Eustace.

"I've been trying to think of all the advantages I should have. No more rows with Dad, or being hurled almost into Kingdom-come as I was to-day. And I should get away from the shadow. . . ."

"The shadow," he repeated.

"Oh, it was round us all just now—Dad and Mummie and myself."

"Was it? But I've an idea we can't get away from it just by leaving home. It might follow us. We don't know. We've got to find out what it is first—what it stands for—why, it's there."

"I found out one thing this morning," said Vicky. "When Mummie came in I asked her if she'd been forced into marrying Dad. Somehow it didn't seem possible to me just then that anyone could want to be with him always, of their own free will. I felt she must have been forced into it. And then, Eustie—oh, it was horrible—I thought he would have killed me. He made me think of Heathcliff—he is rather like him, isn't he? He seized me and flung me to the ground. I hit my head against the corner of the writing-table and cut it open—I could feel the blood pouring down my face into my eyes—all soft and warm and horrid. But she—she looked as if I'd stabbed her with something sharp. Her face had a queer tortured look. I knew from that she must have been somehow made to marry him, and that he knew it too."

"But, darling Vicky, twenty-five or twenty-six years ago—in the eighteen-nineties—people didn't. They weren't quite the Dark Ages, you know. Women were fighting jolly hard for their freedom—some of them were awfully emancipated. And Mummie isn't exactly weak."

The idea disturbed and horrified him.

He tried to assure himself that there could be no truth in such a suggestion. His father's temper had grown decidedly worse of late years, but as a younger man he could not have been wholly unattractive. That formidable physical strength would always make its own appeal to women.

"Of course it entirely depends upon the kind of pressure that was used," continued Vicky, musingly. "And you know I've always believed that grandpapa was a bad hat. He ruined himself with gambling, and she must have had a perfectly wretched life with him. Of course she never talks about it—she never tells us anything what happened. It was Gerard who found out something and told Barbara. And from all I can gather he must have been even more trying as a father than Dad! Dad at any rate is frightfully respectable."

They both laughed. Then Eustace said:

"Look here, Vicky—we must try and get you away from here for a bit. This kind of thing is ruining your nerves."

"Oh, he'll never let me go till I've promised to marry Mr. Soames in July."

"July!" Eustace' face was aghast.

"That's the idea,"—she made a little grimace—"besides, where on earth could I go?"

"We might go somewhere together. I'll speak to Mummie."

"Oh, Eustie—it's awfully kind of you—but it isn't any good. I'll just stay here, and do what they want. I can't fight any more."

She leaned back on her pillow and closed her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear child," whispered Eustace' voice.

She looked at him.

"Do you think Mummie and I would stand by and see you forced into a marriage you hated?" he said.

"I couldn't make her out this morning," said Vicky. "She didn't actually take my part or Dad's. She hardly said a word, but when I was hurt she made me lie on the sofa and bound up my head."

She had been aware, even at the height of her own emotion, of the ambiguous, enigmatic attitude of her mother. It was almost as if she had not dared to say anything in her daughter's defense.

"She can't possibly wish for it!" exclaimed Eustace, with abrupt determination. "He isn't a bad sort, old Soames—I really rather liked him last night. But he's years too old for you, Vicky. What a pity he doesn't offer his hand and heart and his beastly fifteen thousand a year to Pamela!"

"It's what she's been hoping for, I'm perfectly certain," said Vicky, with a wan little smile. "What luck for her!"

Pamela's discomfiture seemed to be the one bright spot in the whole episode.

"Well, she may get him yet if she plays her cards well. He seems bent on having a wife from Pendre. And Moth Hill Park would exactly suit her. I must be off now, darling. I shall take a walk before lunch. Cheer up, my child—all is not yet lost!" He struck a melodramatic attitude that forced another smile from her.

He wanted to go out into the woods and formulate some plan for taking his sister away from her present environment. Vicky was capable of yielding for the sake of peace —therein lay her great danger. Martin was too far away to be of any present help to her. And Eustace dreaded her assent to this marriage as a means of escape from Pendre and its shadow. . . .

4

Pamela knew there had been a disturbance; it affected the whole household. Vicky remained in her room that day. It was difficult to discover exactly what had passed, for Lord Pendre had shut himself into his study and would see no one.

Sometimes Pamela felt that Eustace could read her thoughts, and it made her feel a little ashamed of their jealousy, their meanness. Every day now they seemed to grow a little further apart. And she had displeased him, as she knew, by her remarks about Vicky at breakfast that morning.

She was outraged by his cool indifference, by the composed rather sarcastic manner, which made her feel as if he were continually fencing with her. Parrying her words, eluding her thrusts, quite ready to wound if she pressed or provoked him too far. Eustace was, she decided, far the cleverest of the Wingraves. His intelligence was astute; his intuitions were almost feminine in their uncanny power of discerning the very truth one most wished to hide.

Lord Pendre had certainly hoped that Eustace would ultimately console Pamela for the loss of Philip. He had even hinted as much to her. But now she could only bitterly see that Eustace avoided her on every possible occasion. Vicky's influence was undoubtedly at work—perhaps a careless word concerning the project had reached her ears, so that she had been able to put him on his guard.

At first Pamela had not been attracted by him. He had little of his brother's splendid physique and personal beauty, nothing of his gay, irresistible charm, his sunny disposition, his eager, ardent love of life and all that it could give him. There had been something about Philip Wingrave that literally swept you off your feet. . . . But now that she was beginning to know Eustace better, she could discern qualities in him that Philip had never possessed at all. Deep qualities of heart and intellect, a touch of wonderful idealism . . . a charm that was not at first perceptible but that grew upon one slowly but very surely, so that almost without her knowing it she had fallen in love with him.

At first her thoughts had been concentrated upon those things which he was able to give her. She had pictured him returning with a subdued eagerness to occupy his brother's place at home, in the firm . . . and perhaps even in regard to herself. Instead of which he had shown them all very plainly that he hadn't wanted anything that was Philip's. He had displayed this cool, critical, independent spirit. He refused utterly to be coerced or forced into any given path. He belonged to himself, as the saying goes; he had no need of anything they could offer him. He seemed to set aside wealth and physical ease and worldly position just as if they were things for which he had no use. And Vicky—her own malicious little enemy, Vicky—was the one person who seemed to approach him with any intimacy. . . .

Then this morning, his cool indifference toward herself had possessed a hint of more definite hostility, that flicked her like a lash. It revealed to her the measure of her own feeling for him, so that she had left him, to go up to her own room and cry. She was furious with herself for giving her love unasked, without hope of return or requital, but there it was, and she was not sure if she could prove capable of hiding it. She was always afraid lest Vicky with her keen, ruthless young vision should discover it and perhaps tell Eustace.

When she spoke to him now, Pamela often opposed or disagreed with him in order to hide her own feeling for him. It was mere camouflage. She was miserable . . . she hadn't felt such keen and bitter and humiliating misery as this in all her life. Even when Philip died she had not been half so wretched; there had been something ennobling in that sorrow; it had never been touched by this hot, burning shame.

She was beginning to feel how wonderful it would be to be loved by Eustace, to see his shining, enthusiastic eyes fixed upon her, as if the world contained nothing else. And then she realized his antagonism afresh, the remembrance of his light, wounding speeches came back to her like a blow. And yet she was beautiful—very beautful if she could believe what Philip had told her so often. . . .

She wanted Eustace to go away; she felt that she couldn't go on living there, in the same house, seeing him every day . . . And yet it would be a thousand times worse without him. . . His absence would be a more bitter thing than even his hostile presence.

Luncheon that day was a terrible meal. Lord Pendre looked savagely angry; he hardly spoke at all. Eustace was calm, addressing sometimes a few words to his mother. Vicky did not appear.

The scene must have surpassed in violence all the many scenes of which Pamela had had cognizance since her first coming to Pendre. Vicky had certainly reduced the way of exasperating her father to a fine art. She deserved all she got, and Pamela was a little curious to know exactly what she had received on this particular occasion.

"May I go up and see Vicky?" she asked Lady Pendre, when the meal was over and Lord Pendre had vanished moodily into his study.

"No—better not. I want her to rest."

Pamela went indolently out of the room.

When she had gone, Eustace turned to his mother.

"Anything more happened?"

She shook her head. "I must try to get your father to give up this idea."

"Well, this sort of thing simply can't go on. It's killing Vicky."

"I only wish I could put an end to it."

"Dad must be perfectly insane!" said Eustace, bitterly.

"Vicky's such a miserable little baby still, she half thinks it's her duty to obey him. Can't you do anything?"

He gave her one of those long, searching half-accusing looks, as if he were reproaching her for not coming more actively to her daughter's assistance.

"But, Eustace—what am I to do?" she cried.

He thought suddenly: "So she's getting to the end of her tether too. . ." But aloud he only said: "You could take Vicky away—abroad. She's wretched here. It's up to you to—to *save* her."

"He'd never let us go," she answered. "And it would be difficult too for me to leave him. We have always stayed together. He can't bear me to go away even for a week without him."

She rose and went to the door. Eustace sprang up and opened it for her. He saw her go across the hall and enter her husband's study. There was something drooping, almost lifeless, about her attitude. So she, too, was suffering from conflicting loyalties. But through it all, Eustace was never able to doubt, as Vicky did, her love for her husband. The bond between them was a very strong one. She could not influence him, because he was a man almost incapable of being influenced by anyone. But she wielded a certain power. Eustace wondered how far that power would avail to save Vicky now.

5

Lord Pendre was writing letters. He looked up irritably as his wife came into the room.

"Well, what is it?"

"Didn't Ernest Soames say he was coming to-night?"

"Yes."

"You must telephone and put him off. He can't possibly see Vicky with that dreadful cut on her face."

"If you want to know, I've already telephoned. And he tells me that he's going to the South of France for a few weeks. I thought it wasn't a bad idea. By the time he comes back Vicky may be in a better frame of mind."

"I'm very glad he's going. I wanted to ask you to let me take Vicky away."

"You?—Vicky?"

Never before had she come to him with such a request as that on her lips. Never had she suggested leaving him, even for a few weeks. The broad, black brows met in a straight, heavy line across his face.

"So you mean to go against me, Giselda?"

"I've no choice. She's my daughter. One has duties to one's children as well as to one's husband. And after what she said this morning—"

"I know that she said a great deal that was excessively impertinent. If she'd been a boy I'd have thrashed her soundly!"

"I felt that in another moment I should have to tell her," she pursued, taking no notice of the interpolation. "You mustn't drive me into doing that, you know."

She looked at him steadily, fearlessly. There were certain things to which normally they never alluded. Things they had tacitly agreed to keep out of sight. Their long shared life had enforced a kind of reticence, had promoted a certain oblivion. They had suffered together, and suffering mutually shared sometimes produces a bond almost as strong and imperishable as that of love. Yet, Lord Pendre knew that his wife had loved him. She had not only loved him, but she had made heavy sacrifices for him. He wondered sometimes if she still remembered them. He had been almost uniformly good to her, as if aware that the very structure of their happiness was not of a kind to bear a great deal of sharp testing. He had been lavishly generous, too, as if to compensate for those things of which he had deprived her. Perhaps she had thought that the deprivation would not be permanent. But she must have learned by this time that he would never consent to give her back those things of which she had been robbed. Even where she was concerned there was a hard streak in his character. She could have all but the one thing, and for some time the very desire for that withheld gift had atrophied, so to speak, in her heart.

Philip's death had aroused it to new life. It had not been dead, that longing, that thirst of the soul, and its awakening had given her acute torture. She needed it now more than anything that his millions could give her.

Would Eustace find it? Would Vicky find it? With young disdain they flicked aside the worldly gifts and prizes that were offered to them. Restless, and hungry of adventure and experience, they refused the proffered toys with characteristic contempt. They would have none of them. But they were seeking they knew not what. Something that subconsciously they were aware was missing in their lives. Just as if something of her own spiritual hunger had communicated itself to them because they were her children. . .

When she thought of Eustace now, she prayed that he might not through blindness or ignorance miss the road.

Lord Pendre's angry voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Drive you? What on earth do you mean?" he snapped. "It's perfectly absurd your talking to me like that! It hasn't got anything to do with Vicky at all. It seems to me the only person I can get anything approaching sense from now is Pamela!"

"I'm afraid Pamela sees what an advantage it would be for her if Vicky were to marry."

"Now why should you accuse her of that? Poor little thing—you're all against her!"

"Not at all. But now Vicky's grown up it changes Pamela's position here. Vicky takes her place as the daughter of the house."

"I won't have Pamela made to feel anything of the kind! You'll only succeed in driving her away if you suggest anything of the sort to her."

"People will naturally invite Vicky when they wouldn't think of asking Pamela." Her tone was cool and steady.

"I wish to goodness that Eustace—" began Lord Pendre.

"It's no good thinking of that. They aren't even sympathetic to each other. Eustace would never think of her in that way, though sometimes I'm a little afraid she's beginning to care for him."

"Nonsense, Giselda! You must be making a mistake. How could she think twice about that ill-conditioned boy—after our dear Phip?"

"I'm sure she is beginning to."

"Well, nothing would please me better than those two marriages. Vicky and Ernest—Eustace and Pamela. Our three children would be most happily and comfortably settled."

"It's no use your thinking about it, Hugo. And I can't let Vicky be sacrificed. You've had your own way with her always up till now, and I can tell you it hasn't been very easy for me to stand by and watch her being—bullied!" She flung the word at him with an almost cruel emphasis. "Rather than that you should force her into this marriage, I would take her away myself."

He stared at her in incredulous astonishment. It was the first time she had ever attempted to interfere between him and any of their four children. This little speech of hers, insignificant and unimportant in itself, seemed to inaugurate a new epoch—one which might even hold a drastic change in their own harmonious mutual relations.

His pride suffered something of hurt. He had believed that her mute acquiescence had been based always upon a profound inward approval of his words and actions. And now she frankly told him that it hadn't always been easy for her to stand by and watch his treatment of Vicky. Bullied. . . . Perhaps all the time in her secret thoughts—so unknown to him—she had blamed him and pitied Vicky. . .

"You talk as if I'd been a monster to my children!" he exclaimed, with a harsh laugh. "I've always done what I believed to be best for them all. A certain amount of roughness is good for children—it fits them for the hard things of life. And if I didn't believe that Vicky would be happy with Soames, I should never have dreamt of encouraging the marriage. But she mustn't be allowed to wreck her own life by throwing away such a chance as this."

"It's no *use*, Hugo. And Eustace won't let it happen either!"

"Eustace? What's it got to do with him?"

"He's devoted to Vicky—you know what friends they've always been."

"Just let him come and tell me that he's going to try to prevent it, that's all!" His dark face had a grim, forbidding expression.

"If you ask him, he'll tell you just what he thinks. That it's—*insane*!" She hesitated before pronouncing the word, but when she did so it held a deadly emphasis.

Lord Pendre's swarthy face flushed a dull red.

"Let him come and tell me that himself—that's all!" he said. He could hardly articulate for rage. That Eustace should dare to pit his puny force against him seemed to him an intolerable assumption of authority.

"Hugo—the children have their own lives to lead. We can't interfere. Parents don't, you know. They try to keep the friendship and the confidence of their children, but they have to let them find their own paths. . ." There was a sound of pleading in her voice.

But he did not answer, and in the pause that followed she went out of the room, leaving him alone.

CHAPTER XI

Sursum Corda

1

EUSTACE rose early one morning. He slipped out of the house, took a short cut through the woods, and was soon on the smooth high road that ran parallel with the shore to Llyn.

It was May, and the May dew drenched everything, the ferns, the long grasses shivering in the wind, the blossom that dripped from lilac and laburnum and hawthorn, the silver moon-daisies. In the distance a cuckoo was calling, the soft persistent monotonous sound made itself heard above the songs of all other birds. It was still early and a mist hung over the sea.

The pure racing spring air was fragrant with dewy earth and woodland flowers. Here and there in glimpses the sea revealed itself, colorless and very calm. In the distance there was a smudge of purple-colored smoke. Overhead the gulls flew restlessly, giving their little mewing cries. Somewhere up in the sky, a lark was singing its joyous matins.

To his right the green meadows dipped to the shore. Beyond them was the belt of warm yellow sand. Before him lay the little modern town of Llyn—a red blur of clustered houses above which the lazy blue smoke curled from innumerable chimneys. The town was spreading rapidly, and the red and white villas that climbed the low hills to the back of it were already beginning to form themselves into streets and avenues; they were no longer so scattered and isolated. In a few years Llyn would be quite a fashionable seaside resort for people from the great midland manufacturing towns, as well as from Liverpool and the West Riding, competing perhaps with Rhyl and Llandudno.

The Catholic church at Llyn stood a little apart from the town, on one of the steep roads that climbed toward the hills. Eustace had often passed it quite carelessly in the old days. It had held no possible interest for him. And he had little motive for seeking it now except the very human boyish one of wishing to see Nella Tresham again.

More than two months had passed since their meeting on the Llyn road, but she had been constantly in his thoughts. If she chanced to see him this morning she might even guess what had brought him hither. He didn't mind much. He would perhaps have liked her to know that it was for that reason.

He had felt grateful to Soames for his carelessly proffered information about Miss Tresham's daily habits. That he had not acted upon it before, had been due to a variety of reasons. Mainly perhaps they were concerned with Vicky. He hadn't liked to risk a contest with the Powers just when Vicky was so unhappy and unpopular. But Soames was still away; a truce had been called until his return. The scar on her white forehead was now only a tiny red mark. The storm had subsided, and Eustace had honestly tried in those past weeks to devote himself to his sister. She was too lonely. It was for her sake that he had not left home, although his presence there, idle and unemployed, was beginning openly to annoy his father. But he had an idea that before long he would have to take Vicky forcibly away. Quite away—perhaps abroad. She could certainly have a nervous breakdown if this affair were to crop up again . . . He couldn't, just for selfish motives, leave her in the lurch at such a highly critical time.

But this morning he had been sensible of an urgent desire to see Miss Tresham again, and the Catholic church at Llyn was of all places the one where she was most likely to be found.

And yet subconsciously, Eustace knew that his intentions were not so free from a deeper spiritual motive as he wished to think. Catholicism was in his thoughts, and indeed had haunted them persistently since that nocturnal visit he had paid to the ballroom with Vicky. Nor had it been a mere idle fancy that had made him tell himself that if he ever inherited Pendre he would replace that extinguished lamp in a restored chapel. In common justice it would be his initial action. And for the first time he had seen that he could do something for Pendre that Philip perhaps would never have thought of doing.

This thought, this desire to re-light that lamp in its ancient sanctuary consecrated once more to Catholic worship, had become a definite ambition with him. But to achieve it he would have to form his life on those conventional lines he hated. He would have to concentrate his mind upon submitting to his father's will and taking that proffered place in the firm. Otherwise there would be small chance of his ever possessing Pendre.

Nevertheless, Catholicism had never seemed to him quite a probable solution of his future spiritual adventure, postponed because he realized the impossibility of deserting Vicky during the present crisis. At any moment Soames might return to Moth Hill Park, and the whole subject would be reopened. And without his constant support and sympathy Eustace felt that Vicky was capable of yielding to paternal pressure and embarking upon this loveless marriage. Martin was too far away, and if he wrote, his letters never reached her. Eustace felt keenly his own responsibility in regard to Vicky. . .

But always for him there was that future day when he would deliberately seek the things of the spirit. He felt the need of them more and more in his daily life, here at Pendre, where they were so pushed out of sight and where the gospel of wealth, efficiency and success was so assiduously preached. But he knew very little of the Catholic religion, and had never come across any Catholics until the War. Then he had once or twice been rather intimately associated with Catholic officers, one of whom in dying had given him the crucifix he always wore, only entreating him not to remove it until he was dead. It was that same little crucifix his mother had kissed with so much repressed emotion, such a passion of reverence. Almost as if it had been something very dear to her. . . Nothing about her had ever puzzled him so completely as that little impulsive action.

That his father possessed a deep and personal detestation of the Catholic religion and all that it stood for, had seemed abundantly clear to Eustace ever since that night when Soames had dined at Pendre and had spoken of the Chittendens and their chapel. Lord Pendre's bitter little speech had remained in his son's mind, and more and more did it seem to him that some such secret hatred toward the Church of which they were members, had actuated his arbitrary decision not to allow his wife to call upon the Treshams. Obviously he was resolved to eliminate all such influences from his own home.

What would he say now if he could see his son, tramping along the road to Llyn at this early hour for no other purpose in the world but to attend the eight o'clock Mass in a Catholic church?

As Eustace drew nearer to his goal his thoughts became more violently concentrated upon the subject of religion. Having passed his father's attitude toward the Catholic church in rapid review, he began to consider his own education in matters of religion. What he had learnt on that subject, he had learnt in school classroom. From his own home life it had been utterly excluded, and this perhaps of set purpose. Just that weekly pilgrimage with his father on Sunday mornings to the parish church. The boredom of the sermon. An occasional vehement attack from the vicar on the subject of "Romish" errors and practices infiltrating the Church of England with their subtle poison. No such practices existed at Pendre, and Eustace hardly knew what they were, but concluded that an allusion to the confessional had been intended. But when his first emancipation from home influence and home tyranny had come to him during the War, his thoughts had turned almost passionately to religion. In the trenches, in camp, in hospital, on board ship, it had haunted him persistently until it had acquired puzzling and extravagant proportions in his mind. He was curious, but with his curiosity there was a deep instinctive reverence, a great personal love—though how he had got it he could never tell—for our Blessed Lord.

Since his return home he had begun to suspect his parents of some deep divergence on the point. His mother had always been silent about religion, never telling her children the simplest Bible stories or teaching them their first prayers. Undoubtedly, therefore, the subject touched her deepest reserves. But he could remember asking her once if he had been baptized. She had paused, looking at him with grave, serious eyes. He had known instinctively that she didn't want to answer his questions. And then she had said quietly: "Your father had you christened the day you were born." That was all, and her frozen look and manner had effectually forbidden further questioning.

He had longed to ask her then if it had been done with her consent or not, but he had felt chilled and repulsed into silence. She had made him, however, implicitly aware that the fact of his baptism had had nothing to do with herself. Had she disapproved? Had she not wished her little newborn son to participate in this sacrament? Had she some secret animosity toward religion? But as if to contradict such a dreadful supposition, his mental vision immediately reconstructed that little scene when she had stooped over him to clutch his crucifix and had raised it passionately to her lips.

Now he had come to the steep, muddy little path that led straight up to the church and presbytery. He paused for a moment outside the closed door. From this height he could look across the clustered roofs of Llyn to the sea beyond. Eastward the fields, very green on this May morning, stretched away till they joined the Pendre woods, now a mist of brilliant emerald.

It was very silent except for the sharp shrill cry of the gulls, and the deep distant voice of the sea. Even on calm days at Llyn the sea seemed to "call."

2

Eustace lifted the latch and entered the church. The priest was already at the altar, wearing red vestments. Mass had begun, but, looking at his watch, Eustace saw that it was only a few minutes after eight. He knelt down as everyone else was kneeling, and bowed his head for a moment in prayer. Then he glanced round the building.

It was modern and rather bare, the walls were whitewashed, the benches and the solitary confessional were made of pitch-pine. It had nothing of the dim diffused light, jewelled by windows of ancient glass, that he remembered in that foreign cathedral. There were not many people present, perhaps about a dozen in all, distributed over the various benches. Men, women, and children, mostly of the poorer working type, shabbily dressed.

Before the altar a bronze lamp with ruby-colored glass flickered. It was the one ancient and beautiful thing in the church, probably it had been the gift of some private donor. When Eustace looked at it now, he thought of the lamp at Pendre—the lamp that had burned for five centuries and had been extinguished a dozen years ago. He felt a sense of vicarious guilt, as if he were not wholly able to dissociate himself from this action of his father's in turning the chapel into a ballroom, thus obliterating every trace of its ancient and holy office.

It was not—and of this he felt perfectly convinced—the origin and source of the shadow, for the chapel had been dismantled before his father went to live at Pendre, but that it was in some way definitely though mysteriously connected with it he could not emphatically deny.

Supposing someone should see him here—recognize him as Lord Pendre's son? Gossip, as he knew, spread rapidly in country places, and the fact of his presence there that morning might easily reach his father's ears. And somehow he didn't want that to happen. He was perfectly aware of his father's bitter and intolerant hatred of the Catholic Church—a hatred so strong that it even suggested he had some personal grudge against it. It was a sentiment possessing indeed the bitterness that characterizes a dislike commonly bestowed not only upon those who have wronged, but also upon those who have been in some way wronged.

Eustace put up his hand, and felt for the crucifix that even impossible. When could his father have come into direct conflict with the Catholic Church? How could he in any sense have wronged it? And yet the extinguishing of that lamp—his satisfaction in the accomplishment of the deed had seemed when he spoke of it to partake of the quality of an act of vengeance.

Eustace put up his hand, and felt for the crucifix that lay hidden beneath his shirt, close to the throbbing of his heart.

There was a general movement as the priest went to the Gospel side of the altar; everyone rose and crossed themselves on brow, lips and breast. Eustace stood up, too, and now for the first time his eyes discerned Miss Tresham. She was standing in the front bench, and by her side was Mrs. Welby. Nella, slightly the taller of the two, wore a black coat and a small blue hat that with its down-turned brim hid her face and bright hair almost entirely.

He longed for her then to know of his presence. Perhaps she would turn her head. . . . But she did not, and presently he saw her kneel once more, her face hidden in her little ungloved hands.

So this was part—not the least part, surely—of her daily life. He found himself envying her, because for her spiritual things were already settled and confirmed in their ordered, punctual regularity. She must have been brought up from her earliest to believe in the tremendous dogmas of the Catholic Church. She had had no suffering odyssey to fulfill. Never for her perhaps were those words which surely every convert must have applied at least once to himself: *"I have sought Thee sorrowing. . . ."*

Suddenly it seemed to him as if he alone of all those present were standing poor and shivering and dispossessed upon a cold doorstep, while within everyone was happy, warmed, and fed. Needing nothing . . . for had they not all things in the one?

He thought of Pendre, crammed full of material comfort, and yet so cold, so lifeless, so inanimate. No museum could have seemed to him more impersonal in its possessions. He thought of Vicky, little more than a child, being forced into a loveless marriage. Himself thrust into a career for which he had neither taste nor aptitude. And for both money, and yet more money, was the glittering goal. Surely, if his father had ever considered their lives from a spiritual standpoint, he would hesitate before trying to impose his will upon them in matters so vital to their happiness and well-being.

And his mother? . . . Somehow, in this matter, he wasn't able altogether to dissociate them. She belonged so little to herself—so completely to her husband. The old puzzle!—with its heart-breaking insolubility. Sometimes Eustace felt as if she had lent herself to some pact whereby she had relegated their children entirely to his care. More, it was as if she were pledged in honor to this unnatural renunciation, shrinking always from any intimacy with them lest perhaps her influence should inadvertently sway them. . . .

Across the silence Eustace heard the priest's voice slightly raised. *"Sursum corda . . ."*—the words reached his ears with a curious distinctness. Then, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.* . . . A bell rang sharply, like an imperative summons. Everyone knelt down, and Eustace almost mechanically followed the general example. *Sursum corda.* . . Lift up your hearts. . . He felt the command like a clarion cry. It impressed him almost against his will. He felt, indeed, as if it were being especially addressed to himself—the poor shivering one upon the doorstep, who was only able to watch the lights and, yes, the Feast from afar, unable to participate. The bell rang again, and once more he saw, as he had done long years ago in that foreign cathedral, the Host uplifted for all to worship. There was a deep pause, a silence charged with a holy but fearful suspense. The bell rang again, and he saw the Elevation of the Chalice. The Precious

Blood of the Lamb, wherein sins though they be as scarlet shall be washed as white as wool. . . .

And in that moment the Divine Presence made its first intimate appeal to the heart of Eustace Wingrave. He felt it like the piercing of a sharp yet sweet sword that touched his heart to agony.

He forgot everything else in the world. Body and soul, he surrendered himself to the tremendous, awful, yet beautiful influence that permeated all his senses. He did not struggle as so many do when they first feel that passionate appeal for the soul's complete surrender. The body laid aside its claims in instant renunciation. He thought of that night when he had lain under the Syrian stars, and of the Presence that had, albeit invisibly, consoled him. He did not even envisage exactly what was happening to him, beyond the bald fact that something had, as it were, physically touched him. Yes, pierced him, as surely as the lance of Longinus had pierced the Divine Heart upon the Cross. . . .

Then he remembered having once seen upon an Italian bronze medal of Renaissance days, the sculptured presentment of St. Longinus kneeling at the foot of the Cross, bowed and prostrate with grief and remorse, embracing the Wounds of Him Whom he had pierced. Eustace had always thought it the most poignant thing he had ever seen, and it came into his mind now. And again he thought of that scene when his mother had snatched the crucifix from his hand and kissed it with a passion of remorse and love, as if she too were aware that once she had pierced the Sacred Heart by some act of sin or rebellion. . . .

Mass was over. One by one the worshipers withdrew. There was a sound of wheels outside in the road—the throb of machinery. But Eustace Wingrave still knelt there, his face buried in his hands.

"I meant to go away, to look for You!" he said, once in a whisper. "Can it be true you were so near all the time? . . ."

So near—hidden within the Tabernacle upon the Altar—in the little Catholic church at Llyn. . . .

3

Breakfast, as has been seen, was an old-fashioned ceremonious meal at Pendre, served in the big dining-room at half-past nine o'clock. No hasty swallowing of cups of coffee and slices of crisp toast in the privacy of one's room. Unpunctuality seldom escaped paternal comment or censure, since late-rising was regarded as a subtle form of degeneracy. It was, however, nearly ten o'clock that morning when Eustace reached home, with his boots muddy from the long tramp, his face flushed with exercise and from contact with the brisk morning air; his eyes burning like great lamps as if he had just emerged from some strange exciting experience.

Lord Pendre bestowed upon him a swift ironic scrutiny.

"Where on earth have you been to?"

"For a walk," replied Eustace, laconically, taking his seat at the table.

He exchanged quick glances with Vicky. Pamela sitting opposite intercepted them. What had he been doing? It was so unlike him to go out before breakfast. Vicky perhaps knew. . . .

"I am very glad to hear that your health is so far restored as to permit of your taking a walk before breakfast. But in future you'll kindly be punctual."

"Very well, Dad."

Oh, why couldn't he let him alone? . . .

"As you've nothing else to do all day except to amuse yourself, you can perhaps arrange to take your exercise at a more convenient moment!"

"Very well, Dad. I'm sorry to be late. But I . . . I got delayed."

Lord Pendre was vaguely dissatisfied with these answers, since they offered no real explanation of Eustace' mysterious unpunctuality and late appearance. Besides, the fellow had a queer look in his eyes this morning. If he hadn't been the most abstemious of young men he might even have supposed that he had been drinking. . . What on earth could he have been up to?

Aware that he had never sought to win the confidence of his children, he was yet bitterly annoyed when the fact that he did not possess it was, as in the present instance, clearly demonstrated.

Lord Pendre's temper was always a little short in the morning. He demanded scathingly:

"May I inquire what delayed you?"

"I forgot . . . the time," answered Eustace, still evasively.

From across the table he was conscious that Pamela was watching the little scene with keen interest. Her presence was especially distasteful to him this morning. He intensely disliked being criticized or reprimanded in front of her. He glanced at her, and their eyes met. She looked beautiful, but her loveliness made no appeal to him, the warm, exquisite whiteness of her skin, the dark blue eyes, the gold of her hair. Almost it seemed to him a cold and cruel thing.

"Was it very cold out?" she asked, smiling at him as her eyes met his.

"No—it's a perfect morning," he answered, hardly knowing what he was saying. Had it been cold? He really had not noticed; he only knew that he had returned home warmed through and through.

"Well, I think we may now regard you as cured," said Lord Pendre. "And in that case it's simply absurd for you to remain here in idleness. You must get to work. You've been back nearly three months—" His black eyes flashed. He looked very fierce and formidable. "At your age *I* never had three months' holiday!"

Eustace was silent; he knew the futility of argument. And if it was true that his quest was finished, that there was no need to go out into the world and seek a spiritual solution of his problem because he had found it here, almost at his very gates, it would be perhaps best to submit. To go into the firm—to work—keeping that goal ever before his eyes, the re-lighting of the lamp in Pendre chapel.

When he thought of it his very heart softened. This was what the old house had asked of him on his return. Everything was suddenly quite clear. Clearer than it had ever been. There would be a Catholic chapel at Pendre, if it should ever be his property, because he himself would be a Catholic. Involuntarily he put his hand up to his throat and felt for the chain that encircled his neck. He could feel through his shirt the hard shape of the crucifix.

Yes, he would work, he would earn money, but it would not be for the mere desire of an increased material comfort. He saw himself fighting his way in the world so as to possess Pendre. To have a chapel with the Holy of Holies beneath his roof, and the Lamp burning before it as once it had burned through five centuries of worship and prayer.

"I'm sure I shall be ready to work soon, Dad," he said cheerfully.

Even his mother was astonished. What had led him to this swift submission? She and Vicky knew how he had been kicking against the goad ever since his return home. Why had he suddenly stifled that urgent cry for freedom and liberty?

Lady Pendre looked at him in anguish. Did it mean then that he had deliberately renounced the spiritual quest upon which his heart had been so set? Had the wealth and materialism and comfort of Pendre already enveloped him to such an extent that he was beginning to let it obscure all spiritual issues? She could not believe it, and yet what else could have effected this sudden submission—this renunciation of those higher ambitions?

She, too, wondered where Eustace had been that morning, and why he was obviously so determined not to give any account of his probably quite simple doings. When he came in she had noticed that curious uplifted look he had had in his face. But he, too, like herself, could be secretive and reticent. And how could they expect their grown-up sons and daughters to tell them everything? Especially a young man like Eustace, who for three years had enjoyed independence and perfect exemption from parental interference and coercion. Perhaps he found it galling here, this surveillance, this perpetual questioning. Other men of his age could probably return an hour or so late for breakfast without exciting any other comment than a fear that they might find everything cold. And now this cheerful acquiescence in the suggestion that he was well enough to work! . . . It had astonished her fully as much as it had astonished her husband.

It was a relief when Lord Pendre rose and went abruptly out of the room. He was satisfied now that Eustace was beginning to react to home influences, to yield, to perceive how foolish it would be to quarrel with his bread-and-butter. Perhaps he ought to have paid less attention to those preliminary convulsions, to have shown more patience. But then he had not expected Eustace to submit so quickly and with such a show of sweet reasonableness. Was there any other influence at work behind the scenes? Lord Pendre was always inclined to be suspicious, and a sudden change of front invariably made him so. What was it that his wife had said about Eustace' desire to seek some solution of the religious problem? Well, a few months of hard steady work in the firm would soon sweep those cobwebs from his brain. He would see that Eustace' leisure should be extremely limited. Plenty of strenuous occupation—that was the best cure for spiritual yearnings. He had never had any himself, and he was sure that they were not wholesome things to fill a young man's brain.

Well, he would take Eustace at his word and arrange for him to go north quite soon. While he was at home he only aided and abetted Vicky in her tiresome rebellion. . . .

Vicky soon followed her father's example. She had her music-lesson that day; a professor came over from Chester, and would soon be here. She loved music, and to play the piano was her one talent; she did it brilliantly.

Pamela did not stir. She sat there listening to the desultory conversation carried on by the mother and son. Eustace wished that she would go; he could never talk freely to his mother when she was there. She shadowed Lady Pendre.

"I wish Dad would let me take Vicky away for a bit before

I go north," Eustace said suddenly, "she wants a change—she's looking awfully white."

"So you do really mean to go north?" asked Pamela.

"You heard what I said to Dad." His tone was curt.

"Vicky could go away for a change without you. Barbara's always wanting to have her."

"Barbara!"

"Well, why not? She's her sister. And she can always manage Vicky."

Pamela had adopted Lord Pendre's attitude toward Vicky, regarding her as a troublesome, unreasonable, refractory child.

"And she'd make her see what a perfectly splendid chance this is for her to marry really *well!*" she added.

"Barbara wouldn't look at him herself, so I can't see how she'll be able to persuade Vicky to!"

So Pamela too was strongly ranged on Lord Pendre's side in the matter. If the event had ever caused her the slightest disappointment she had completely recovered from it, and now she saw what an excellent thing it would be for her own happiness that Vicky should marry and leave Pendre. It would prolong her own sojourn there, consolidating her position, which had of late seemed a little precarious owing to the undisguised hostility of Vicky, in which perhaps Eustace had some share. She blamed Vicky for this untoward state of things, and she felt that with her departure she might attain to a greater degree of intimacy with Eustace himself. The prospect of returning to the gloomy, shabby little house in West Kensington, to her father's indifference and her stepmother's scarcely-veiled dislike, was repugnant to her. Her present aim was to make herself indispensable to Lord Pendre. He ruled the house in small things as well as in great; his word was law, his power far-reaching. Witness this sudden, inexplicable capitulation of Eustace after his fiery rebellion. There was something in it of course—some hidden influence at work. Pamela never gave other people any credit for that simplicity of action of which she was herself incapable.

Still, the thought of Eustace intrigued her. She too wondered where he had been that morning, returning with his face aglow as if with some secret happiness, his deep-set eyes flaming like lamps in a dim cavern. He attracted her more and more; she longed to know the thoughts of his heart, his ambitions, his ideals. But he would never speak to her of intimate personal things. He kept that for Vicky, of course. . . .

"What Vicky wants is to be let alone!" he exclaimed, with almost a show of anger. "Her nerves are all wrong. And of course all this fuss about Soames is making her ten times worse. It's monstrous that the subject can't be dropped. If Vicky were my daughter I should forbid her to marry Soames even if she wanted to!"

He flung down the words almost like a challenge.

"Oh, I'm sure she means to marry him in the end," remarked Pamela, tranquilly, "but Vicky always likes to make a scene—she wouldn't be happy otherwise. I think Fa is quite right to be firm."

It irritated Eustace almost beyond bearing when Pamela called Lord Pendre "Fa." Neither he nor Vicky could endure it. He bit back the ironical words that rose to his lips and said very quietly: "I think you're wrong, Pamela. Vicky hasn't the slightest intention of marrying Soames."

"Why are you against it too, Eustace? Why don't you encourage the idea? She listens to you."

"Because I'm not going to stand by and see her make an unholy mess of her life. And she's so young—she'd be miserable. Even the Catholic Church, I believe, annuls a marriage when it can be proved that one of the parties has been forced into it against his or her will."

"But you're not Catholics—luckily—" said Pamela.

Lady Pendre listened in silence to the little heated discussion. But when Pamela said: "But you're not Catholics, luckily," her face changed; her features seemed to stiffen, the line of her lips was more sternly compressed.

"Vicky would have given in ages ago if Fa hadn't shown her he was so keen about it," Pamela went on.

"Then, wasn't it rather a pity—?" Eustace gave her a shrewd, searching glance.

"Fa always shows his hand—he's so outspoken." Pamela spoke hurriedly, aware that she was getting into difficulties. "And really it has it advantages—one knows just where one is."

"One certainly does," observed Eustace, significantly.

He made her feel the rebuke in his tone, which was nevertheless so cold and courteous. He was questioning her right to interfere, to mix herself up in family matters.

Furthering Vicky's marriage, put her in the wrong with Eustace. She wanted more and more to gain his love, but now, alas, they were on opposite sides, and she had little hope of winning him over to her point of view.

What had he been doing this morning? Her curiosity as to his movements was very largely tinged with jealousy. Had Miss Tresham anything to do with this unusual manifestation of matutinal energy? She had seen the girl, of course, and knew that she was universally admired. Her beauty, of the striking conspicuous kind, her lonely position, her devotion to her mother, her life of almost complete seclusion, had given credence to a kind of picturesque legend in the neighborhood.

4

When Soames wrote to say that he intended to remain away rather longer than had originally been planned, Lord Pendre consented to his wife's request that she should be allowed to take Vicky to London for the months of June and July.

Irritated by the mute, rebellious attitude of his youngest child, Lord Pendre agreed that a change of some kind had become absolutely necessary. That scar on Vicky's forehead was a constant reminder of his own ill-temper and violence, and though he tried to assure himself that she had richly deserved all she had got, it was not a very pleasant thing to look upon. The short hair brushed vigorously off her forehead displayed it, too, almost unnecessarily.

In London Vicky would have every opportunity of seeing

Barbara's perfect home, and this would impress upon her the desirability of making a wealthy important marriage.

Barbara at least was not deficient in common-sense. She knew from personal experience the advantages of a devoted husband and a large income. Gerard Hammond adored her, and made a dutiful admiring son-in-law and one who was also extremely useful in financial matters. If he could not rely upon his wife's wisdom, Lord Pendre felt that he could at any rate depend absolutely upon Barbara's. He would write and tell her how badly things were going at home, and give her a hint, too, as to the best policy to pursue with regard to Vicky.

He did not pause just then to analyze Eustace' sudden change of front. He believed that his son had intended all the time to take his place in the firm, just as he believed that Vicky really meant to marry Soames. They just wanted to show their independence, that was all, and then when the time came they could be relied upon to act reasonably. Still, he must keep his eye on Eustace, and see that no fresh outside influence had come into his life. That Tresham girl, for instance. . . . No doubt she was aware what a good *parti* he would be. Well, let him only catch Eustace going to Glen Cottage—that was all! . . .

CHAPTER XII

Lady Pendre Remembers

1

BRAVING discovery—which would have been an awkward thing at such a critical juncture of their family affairs—Eustace rose very early almost every day and walked down to the Catholic Church at L'lyn. He never knew whether Nella Tresham had noticed his constant presence at Mass, morning after morning; he made no effort to speak to her. She was no longer his sole nor even his principal motive for going there.

Other people might have noticed him—people who were aware that he was Lord Pendre's son. His rapt face, his devotional attitude of almost breathless attention, could not but attract and interest a casual observer.

When he contemplated his own future now, it seemed more than ever nebulous and uncertain. He couldn't bring the two things together—his wish to please his father by entering the firm, and his resolve to become a Catholic. It might be that the one action would stand in the way of the other. He was not sure how far his father's prejudice would go, but he was afraid it might go a long way. Perhaps he would disinherit him. Perhaps he would have to choose between religion and the great possessions which he only desired as a means to an end. And even now he felt little doubt as to his own choice. Every day he felt drawn more and more closely to the Catholic Church. Even if it meant never renewing the ancient traditions of Pendre, he was aware that he would have sooner or later to become a Catholic.

The time was drawing near for their departure to London.

Eustace felt that he must certainly speak to Nella before he went away. Just to tell her that he was going—to explain why he would not be seen for perhaps some months to come, in Llyn church.

The morning dawned grey and wet. Far off, the Welsh mountains were wrapped in ragged scarves of cloud that almost obliterated their summits. Although there was very little wind, the sea had a deep, booming, almost tragic sound.

May had decked the world with gleaming showers of emeralds. The hawthorn was everywhere breaking into snowy bloom. In the Pendre woods the crimson flame of rhododendrons contrasted delightfully with the young brilliant verdure of bracken and beech, the scented blue sheets of wild hyacinths. Even the fields that dipped down to the shore were of a more definite emerald. Everything had a more emphatic note of color.

Eustace slipped out of the house—there was never anyone about at that hour. He ran swiftly along a path till he got clear of the Pendre woods. The morning air was very soft and humid, but it held, too, the salt tang of the sea, that gave it a heady quality. The rain that touched his face was of the soft, drenching kind, more like mist than rain. He hardly heeded it in his eagerness to go forward. . . .

Not only to-day for the wonderful half hour that he would spend in Llyn church, but also because he was going to force a meeting with Miss Tresham. Probably little would be said on either side, and nothing that was not strictly commonplace and conventional. Nevertheless, it would be surely a momentous encounter for them both. . . .

The priest was late that morning. Some of the congregation, unable to wait longer, went reluctantly away. Their various avocations recalled them, and Father Sheldon, knowing that most of the Catholics were working people, was invariably meticulously punctual.

When he came in he was wearing black vestments. The clock struck half past eight. Only two people were present besides Eustace—a man and his daughter who kept a little shop in Llyn. Perhaps something had happened to delay Miss

Tresham on her way thither. It might be that she would come in presently. Odd that she should miss Mass just the very morning when he had made up his mind to speak to her. . . .

The black vestments informed Eustace that the Holy Sacrifice was to be offered for the dead. He knew enough about Catholicism now to grasp that it was to be said for the souls who were suffering in purgatory. He had found an ancient Latin Missal at Pendre, and from a diligent study of it had acquired a certain knowledge of the liturgy. He had been surprised to find such a book at Pendre, but in all probability his father was unaware of its existence; he had often in the old days purchased large quantities of books at sales without inquiring into their content. Somehow or other the vast library must be filled, and anything in the shape of an old binding always attracted him.

Eustace lingered a little when Mass was over. Presently he rose and went out, standing by the porch and looking down upon Llyn and the sea, that moaned, grey and misty, beyond. It was still raining, and the grass, trees, and shrubs dripped with moisture.

As he stood there, the priest came out and Eustace raised his hat. He had never spoken to him before; indeed this was the first time they had met thus face to face.

"Good-morning, Father," he said simply.

"Good-morning. It's Mr. Wingrave, isn't it?" said Father Sheldon.

He had been told that of late young Wingrave had constantly been present at Mass. Being aware of Lord Pendre's uncompromising attitude toward the Catholic Church—an attitude for which some people imagined there must be a special personal reason based upon an ancient grudge—he had been slightly astonished at the fact, and had wondered what had brought the young man thither.

"That was a Mass for the dead, wasn't it?" said Eustace.

"Yes. I said it for Mrs. Tresham. She died this morning," answered the priest.

He raised his hand and made the sign of the Cross. Eustace mechanically followed his example.

He turned very pale. The news had given him a shock. "Died this morning?" he repeated.

"Yes. I was with her. She had a sudden heart attack soon after midnight. Miss Tresham came over as soon as she could and fetched me in the car. I'm afraid it made me a little late this morning in consequence. I was sorry—so many people have to go at the half hour."

"I am sorry . . . I'm most awfully sorry . . ." Eustace stammered over the words. "And Miss Tresham?" His lips were dry; he could hardly articulate.

"She's bearing it very wonderfully. You see, I was in time to give her mother the Last Sacraments. Extreme Unction—the Viaticum." He looked at Eustace, wondering a little if these words conveyed anything to him. "Miss Tresham was so afraid we shouldn't get there in time—she had to come herself—there was no one to send. And of course it was very hard on her—having to leave her mother just then when they thought she could hardly live through the next half hour."

"What time did she come for you?" asked Eustace.

"A little before three. It was a long dark drive for her. There was no moon—it was raining."

Eustace thought of her traveling along that lonely dark road, full of fear that her mission might be of no avail and lest they should not arrive back in time to find her mother alive. But for herself she would have had no sort of physical fear such as might have assailed so many women. There would only be the dread of not obtaining the last consolations of religion for the one who was so dear to her.

It seemed to Eustace that he was learning more about her—learning too just how wonderful and courageous she was. While his heart ached to be with her, he felt the distance between them acutely. He had no right even to go and offer a commonplace sympathy. He was quite outside her life; they seemed to have no meeting-ground at all. . . .

Now he was conscious that the priest was watching him with compassionate eyes.

"You see, I know Miss Tresham slightly," he explained. "Enough to realize what this must mean to her."

"Yes—she was passionately devoted to her mother. And now she is absolutely alone in the world except for Mrs. Welby. They'll be badly off, I'm afraid—Mrs. Tresham had a small pension that died with her."

"I wish I could have seen Miss Tresham," said Eustace, "but I know her so slightly it wouldn't be possible. Perhaps you'll tell her, though, that I was here at Mass—that you told me about it. Say how sorry I am, and that I'm thinking of her—yes, and praying for her."

His deep eyes sought the priest's with something of appeal.

"I'll certainly give her your message when I next see her," said Father Sheldon.

He held out his hand and Eustace grasped it.

"Thank you, Father," he managed to say. Then with an effort: "Have you been here long? I mean, were you here before we came? Did you know Pendre when it was Catholic?"

"No—I've only been here since the Armistice. But my predecessor, Father Richmond, often spoke to me of old Mrs. Chittenden. I know he used to hope that some Community would buy the place and keep up the Catholic tradition."

"I must be going," said Eustace. "I'm late as it is. Forgive my keeping you like this in the rain—I wanted to hear more. You see, my coming here has had to be kept rather secret. Perhaps you've heard that my father's very strongly opposed to the Catholic Church—I don't think he'd like it if I were to become a Catholic. But I found it difficult to stay away from Mass—after the first time. It was more wonderful than I thought."

He made the confession with a frankness and sincerity that touched the priest.

"God bless you and help you to find your way," said Father Sheldon. "I know it's often very hard for the convert. But if I can ever be of any use to you, you must let me know."

"Thank you, Father. And you won't forget to give my message to Miss Tresham?"

"I promise to remember."

They shook hands again and Eustace hurried away. Father Sheldon walked into the presbytery deep in thought. Perhaps the young man with the great possessions, whom Jesus looking upon had loved, might have resembled this young Wingrave. A pale sensitive face, glowing enthusiastic eyes, eager, ardent, loving. . . .

2

Eustace ran down the path to the road. It was already half past nine, and it would take him nearly three-quarters of an hour to get home even if he went by the short cut across the wet fields. In any case he would be very late, and could hardly escape being questioned narrowly about his doings. But somehow he cared little for that to-day; his thoughts were so supremely occupied with Miss Tresham and her sudden bereavement.

She would be alone in the world except for Mrs. Welby. Living thus in complete seclusion at Glen Cottage, she could have had little opportunity for forming friendships. And it might be, even in her present straitened circumstances, that she would not be able to continue to live there. Eustace was filled with anxiety at the thought of her future.

How thankful he was that he had lingered behind that morning, and had stopped to greet Father Sheldon. It might be possible in future to hear news of Nella through him. He might form a link . . .

He had liked Father Sheldon, with his narrow dark ascetic face, his piercing eyes. Some day he would perhaps want to consult him on his own account. The priest had reminded him that sometimes the way was hard for converts, and looking at the matter from a purely worldly point of view Eustace felt convinced that for himself it would be extraordinarily hard. It would mean perhaps forfeiting that goodly inheritance which had suddenly become so important and valuable in his eyes. He had been prepared to work and slave for Pendre, as he would never have consented to work and slave for himself. The renunciation of this part of his great possessions would certainly mean a great deal to him. His father wasn't likely to forgive him should he decide to become a Catholic. His bitter animosity had flashed out afresh that night when he had spoken of the Treshams and of the chapel that used to be at Pendre. Surely, he must have some definite reason for this violent hatred. . . . Perhaps his mother knew something . . . he would find an opportunity of asking her. But of course she knew! That little scene on the night of his home-coming rose up before his eyes and seemed to be invested with a fresh significance. She *did* know, but he dared not break through that icy reticence of hers by demanding the truth.

Once he had thought and spoken of going out in the world and seeking the truth about religion for himself. Now he perceived with a sense of astonishment that it had not been necessary to go so very far; it had been here, close to him and as it were waiting for him, all the time. Perhaps Almighty God gave an answer quickly when the seeker was sincere in his desire. *Ask and ye shall receive* . . . There had been no need for him to set forth upon an arduous pilgrimage. Yet his gesture of appeal had been so slight, his prayer so formless, he could hardly realize that the answer had come, that his quest was already at an end . . .

And then quite suddenly there came to him a vision of Nella Tresham driving down to Llyn in the rain and darkness of the spring night, leaving the bedside of her dying mother at a moment when she must surely have found it most difficult and even heart-breaking to do so. Not knowing whether she would ever see her again alive. Bent only on fetching Father Sheldon to give her those Rites which alone could fortify and strengthen the soul in its hour of sharpest need. There had been no one else to send, and so she had gone herself, braving the storm and darkness, fearful only that she might be too late.

There must surely have been some urgent need for her action, something imperative that could not be denied. It was necessity, not choice, that had constrained her to go. The task was one that had to be achieved for her mother's sake, at all costs. She could not let her go forth on that last tremendous and lonely journey without the consolations the Church could give.

Eustace quickened his steps. All the time he was thinking of Nella Tresham driving, driving with fearful speed through the darkness of the spring night to fetch Father Sheldon. . . .

3

Lord Pendre had left home early that morning to motor to Chester, where he had business to accomplish, consequently his son's late return escaped his knowledge.

When Eustace came into the dining-room he found himself alone there. His mother, Vicky, and Pamela had finished their breakfast and departed. He sat down, unable from agitation and excitement, to eat much, but a servant brought some hot coffee, which warmed and revived him.

He had not been there very long when the door opened and Lady Pendre came into the room.

"Oh, you're back, Eustie dear. I was beginning to be anxious."

He jumped up and kissed her. "Good-morning, Mother. I'm sorry to be late." His voice was soft, almost wistful.

She sat down by the window. It was still raining. A great chestnut tree showed its superb pyramids of silver blossom just beyond the lawn. Through the open window came a scent of lilac-bloom perfumed like sweet almonds. Blackbirds and thrushes were singing lustily in the grove of trees to the right of the house. It was a day of spring, of rejuvenation, of growing, blossoming sweetness. But Eustace was thinking of Nella—alone with her dead.

It seemed to him that his mother was waiting for him to speak, to offer perhaps some explanation of his absence. She was aware by this time that he was in the habit of taking long walks regularly before breakfast, irrespective of the weather. Some new health-fad, her husband was inclined to suppose—a method of keeping fit.

He said abruptly, without preliminary:

"Mrs. Tresham died early this morning. There was Mass for her at Llyn—in the Catholic church."

As he spoke he fixed his dark eyes upon her face.

"Mass!" she repeated. She lingered over the word—oh, it was no strange one to her, he felt convinced of that! . . . Her eyes met his, full of a nameless fear and dread. Then:—"Eustie, how do you know all this, my dear?"

"I was there," he answered briefly. "In church."

"You were there?"

So he had not erred in his seeking. Her prayers had not been in vain. She clasped her hands, and waited for him to speak.

"I'd better tell you. I've been wanting you to know. I felt, after the way you kissed my crucifix that night, you couldn't hate it all so much as I used to think. But you'd better keep it from Dad for the present if you can. I'm afraid it'll only annoy and worry him. He still wants to rule me body and soul as he did when I was a schoolboy."

She stirred restlessly. "Yes—tell me."

He came over and sat down by her side.

"I've been going to Mass regularly for some weeks past. That's what made me often so late in the morning. I couldn't always get back in time. Once I'd begun to go, it was difficult to keep away, and so difficult, too, to leave when one was there. You know what Catholics believe—that Our Blessed Lord is really present in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. Without the faith I suppose it would be impossible to believe it, but when one has the faith it's perfectly simple . . . . and after a time you not only believe, you *know*. You remember, I told you when I first came home that I wanted to go away and find out about religion—about Our Lord. I was afraid it would be tremendously difficult. . . . But I wasn't allowed to wait. I didn't have to seek. . . . it was here all the time. Close to me. Waiting for me."

His eyes shone with a strange almost mystical fervor.

"But you haven't—?" she began. She could not utter the words.

"Oh, I haven't taken any steps—I think I should always have told you beforehand. I'm still most awfully in the dark about many things. Until to-day I hadn't even spoken to a priest, but I like the one at Llyn. He seems an understanding kind of chap—I believe he did awfully well in the War. I stopped him this morning and asked him if that hadn't been a Mass for the dead. The vestments were black, there was no Gloria, no blessing. It was all solemn and strange and different. And then he told me it was for Mrs. Tresham, who died this morning."

Then a very unexpected thing happened, so swiftly and spontaneously that he could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes. He even found himself thinking involuntarily: "Did she? . . . . Did she really?" For when he uttered those words his mother lifted her hand and very rapidly made the sign of the Cross, touching her brow and breast. Surely he must have been dreaming, and yet he could have sworn that she had indeed made that significant gesture, now so familiar to him. . . .

"I am sorry. That poor little girl—" She broke off.

"She went down at three o'clock this morning all alone in the car to fetch Father Sheldon. It was very plucky of her on such a dark wet night—the going must have been pretty bad. But he said she was only afraid of not getting back in time." His eyes shone.

Lady Pendre made no comment. She held herself very still, as if she were purposely restraining some deep and powerful emotion. Her eyes had that deep brooding look which always seemed to give an increased loveliness to her face, making it unlike other faces.

"But they did get back in time, thank God!" continued Eustace. "The priest was able to give Mrs. Tresham the Last Sacraments!"

"The Last Sacraments . . . ."

"I felt frightfully ignorant when he told me all this. You see, I didn't quite know what it meant, nor why it should be so important. I felt it must have almost broken Miss Tresham's heart to leave her mother for any reason in the world, when she knew that she was actually dying and that she might never see her again alive. But that just showed —didn't it?—how urgent and necessary it was."

Lady Pendre made no reply. She listened attentively; her eyes fixed upon her son's face.

"Mother, do you know anything about it? Do you know just what it all means?"

He paused, waiting for her reply. The room seemed filled with a kind of breathless hush, pregnant with expectancy.

"You can read about it in any book of Catholic doctrine," she answered. "The dying person makes a confession if able to speak, and receives absolution and the Holy Viaticum. Then he is anointed on all his members—eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, and feet. That is called Extreme Unction. To be made ready." Her voice sank a little. "And even if he's already dead when the priest comes he can still be given the last Absolution. That can be done as long as two hours after death because even the doctors don't know the precise moment when the soul leaves the body."

He only said slowly, deliberately:

"One would like to die like that. Prepared. . . ."

He thought of the Lamp, symbol of faith, that had burned through long centuries of change in the ancient chapel at Pendre. Many, many times a priest must have entered the doors of that house to bring the last consoling and fortifying Rites to its dying inmates. Had he come thus for the last time, or would there be in the far future a renewal of spiritual life and energy at Pendre? . . .

Lady Pendre's thoughts were very far away. Memory revived for her a scene, clear in every detail, wherein she herself was lying, a sick child of thirteen or fourteen years old, in a small room at the top of an old, high house in Brussels. And as she lay there, very weak and ill, there was presently a little stir in the passage outside, the door opened, and a group of persons entered carrying candles. They were followed by a priest murmuring Latin words. His hands were clasped above Something that he held against his breast. Not far from the bed someone had prepared a little table as an altar, with candles that made a brilliant patch of light in the dusky room. There were flowers there too, a crucifix, and a stoup of holy water. And on this altar the priest placed his precious Burden—a silver Pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament. He genuflected, and then approached the bedside . . . . Even now she could remember the odor, sweet, strong, pervasive, of the holy oils, as the priest anointed her eyes, ears, nose, tongue, hands and feet. She could just remember receiving the Holy Viaticum before she sank back upon the pillows, scarcely conscious and only dimly aware of what was passing around her. It was as if she had been watching some scene that was being enacted at a great distance. But they had told her just before the arrival of the priest that very soon Our Blessed Lord, Jesus Christ, would come to fetch her. He wanted her in His Heaven, and she must not be afraid to go with Him because He loved her and His Mother would be with Him. She had shut her eyes and waited, conscious of an eager curiosity, and hoping that the wonderful moment would not be too long delayed. Perhaps Our Lord could not come just yet—there were other little children to be fetched—He must have so much to do, since people were dying every moment all over the world. Then she had known no more, but had sunk back into a prolonged unconsciousness that descended upon her like a deep, deep sleep. And afterward, when she awoke, she had cried a little because the nurse told her that she was much better, that she was going to get quite well. The Holy Viaticum often cured people. . . But she could remember weeping, because she felt cheated, defrauded of some glorious perfect adventure. . . . .

Eustace' voice interrupted her dream.

"Have you any books here I could study?"

She roused herself, staring at him almost vacantly. She had been so far away, both as regarded time and place. Brussels—more than thirty years ago—the chimes from Ste. Gudule's twin Gothic towers sounding melodiously through the evening air. The priest entering the room—the sound of his voice murmuring Latin words—the gleam of the silver Pyx upon the altar with its flowers and lights—the hush, the expectancy, the perfume of the Holy Oils, the ineffable sweetness of the Viaticum . . . . *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet. . . .*

She felt, for the first time for many years, the sharp hunger as of one starved.

She gazed at Eustace now, with terrified eyes. Could he discern her thoughts, her memories, with that young relentless penetrating vision of his? Could he look into her heart now, and know its ultimate faithlessness, and all that it held of denial and apostasy? His words spoken weeks ago rang in her ears with a sound of inescapable doom:—*Vicky thinks it's because one of us must have offended God. . . .*

"No . . . I haven't any. . . ."

"I suppose Catholics think a great deal of those things—Extreme Unction—the Viaticum—?" pursued Eustace.

"I suppose they must."

Now she was thinking of Mrs. Tresham, who a few hours ago had gone forth upon that last supreme journey. And she compared the dead woman's life with her own. Mrs. Tresham had been poor. She had lacked all the luxuries of life, and perhaps even many of its necessities. The three women from all accounts lived a very frugal even penurious existence at Glen Cottage. Their only luxury, which had proved of such infinite benefit to them last night, had been the little two-seater which Mrs. Dyrham had given to Nella, paying too for the petrol and upkeep. Lady Pendre had had these details from Ernest Soames. From the same source she knew that Mrs. Tresham, though still a young woman, barely forty years old, had passed through some years of very severe suffering. She had never complained; she had borne it all with perfect resignation, her gaiety had never failed nor the laughing fortitude with which she had endured all the pain and distress of chronic illness. Her faith had controlled her life, ordering all her ways; she had made of it a living rule. She had not only borne her Cross but she had loved it. Such a gallant soul as that had surely little to fear when death came. For her there would be not only release but reward. . . .

Lady Pendre longed to get up and leave the room. Eustace' observant attentive eyes seemed to pierce her. Was he determined to win the truth from her? He was obviously excited by the events of the morning and was in a state of agitation and mental exaltation. He was sensitive too and had been deeply impressed by all that he had heard. It might be that those impressions would affect his whole future life. What part human influence played in them she could not as yet determine—her knowledge was too slight. This son, in his reticences and withdrawals, had made no confidant of her. And it was better so. She could not go on suffering like this in silence, knowing all that he desired to know and yet refraining "even from good words . . . ."

He rose from his seat and came toward her.

"Mother darling," he said impulsively; "I'm afraid I can't let it end there. I must see Nella Tresham again. I must go to Glen Cottage."

Nella Tresham . . . . she knew by the very tone of his voice as he uttered it how dear that name was to him. This woman, who stood to him also for the things of the Faith toward which his soul was surely journeying, was calling to him. And Lady Pendre envied her—this child, bereft of mother and fortune. . . .

"I don't see how you can possibly visit her before we go to London. You hardly know her. You've only seen her that once haven't you, Eustie?"

She put out her slim hand and laid it upon his rough brown coat sleeve.

"Twice," he corrected, "unless you count the times in church, but I hardly think she knew I was there. But we only spoke that second time, when the car broke down and I helped her."

So it had not gone any further; he had not been seeing her, as sometimes she feared that he had. Feared, not for his sake—it was just what she wanted for him—but because of her husband's inexorable anger.

"You might go and inquire—" she suggested.

His face wore a look of relief. At least from her, whose opinion counted most with him, there would be no opposition. He had a wish, so fierce that it was almost painful, that she should see Nella. For surely she would love her. Surely she would take her to her heart.

"How I wish you could have come with me. But you're right—I'll just go and inquire. Perhaps at any rate I shall be able to see Mrs. Welby. It isn't as if I were quite a stranger to them."

"And if you do see Miss Tresham," she said quitely, "I'd like you to tell her that I'm so very sorry . . . . give her some kind message. And if there's anything I can do to help—"

He bent down then and kissed her.

"Thanks most awfully," he said, visibly touched by her words. "I'm sure she understands why—why we've held aloof like this. Catholics do still meet with that kind of treatment in England, you know. Not often, but one runs up against it sometimes. Coldness, and not calling on them or inviting them to one's house. Perhaps I'll go over this afternoon."

"Shall you say anything to Vicky?" Her voice was a little wistful.

"I'll do just as you wish about that."

"Then I think perhaps . . . . not for the present."

He went out of the room, leaving her alone. Never had she found it so difficult to keep that silence to which she was pledged. She had longed to pour forth her treasures of knowledge, so as to help him just now when he had need of help. And never had he been so dear to her.

To this woman perhaps would be entrusted the task of guiding him upon that way, at once so difficult and so simple, so austere and so sweet. This other woman would lead him forward. She felt a pang of envy that pierced her like a sword. It should have been her task—hers only. Yet she had relinquished it of her own free will. Deliberately, intentionally, with full knowledge and consent. Those were the marks of a mortal sin; her rebellion had lacked nothing of them all. And it seemed to her that after twenty-six years of dulled and drugged conscience, her punishment was only just beginning. She was to be punished through Eustace. It might be when he knew all, as surely he must know it one of these days, that she would forfeit his love. He would never say a word of reproach, but she would read his judgment and her own condemnation in those young relentless accusing eyes.

Yet God—the God she had betrayed and denied—would surely console her with the conversion of her son. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

At Glen Cottage

1

GLEN COTTAGE stood a little way back from the road, and was approached by a public pathway, which led from thence to Moth Hill Park. Behind it there was a belt of dark trees, growing on slightly rising ground. Mingling with the somber boughs of the pines, a group of larches showed their vivid emerald showers. There was a view across the Pendre woods to the sea. Moth Hill Park could be seen in the distance, a fine grey Jacobean building situated on the lower spur of a hill, with the river widening into a great lake just below it.

A premature dusk was falling, for the day had continued wet, and a mist had come up from the sea. The damp earth gave forth a delicious fresh scent that mingled with the perfume of wild flowers and blossoming lilacs and laburnums. There was no wind, and a deep silence seemed to surround and envelop the little place as Eustace approached it.

He walked up the narrow muddy path, and stood for a moment beside the wooden gate that opened into the strip of garden. It was carefully tended, and an immense clump of wall-flowers, varying from bright orange to deep crimson velvet gave forth a powerful almond scent that seemed to fill the air.

He looked up at the house. It was tiny, and built of red brick on two floors. Above there were three windows, and below two with a door in the middle. Roses not yet in blossom but displaying fantastic clusters of buds, clambered over the walls in luxuriant profusion. The windows were closely shuttered, and only through a small fanlight above the front door was there visible a faint illumination from some lamp within.

He went up the narrow flagged path to the door and rang the bell. Although he rang very softly, the sound seemed to reverberate through the house with a loud disturbing clang that woke the echoes. Then came a little interval, during which Eustace began to lose courage altogether and to wish that he had never embarked upon the adventure.

They would be certain to think it very odd of him to come—he was such a stranger—his visit at such a time was an outrage, an intrusion . . . to offer his sympathy would seem like an impertinence. . . .

Then he heard footsteps approaching. The door was opened, and he saw Mrs. Welby standing there, looking at him with her kindly dark eyes, that this evening were full of distress and sorrow.

"Mr. Wingrave!" she said.

Eustace held out his hand.

"I came to ask after Miss Tresham. How is she?"

"Nella's very tired, she's resting now. How did you hear?"

"Father Sheldon told me after Mass this morning. And I wanted her to know that I was thinking of her—I'm most frightfully sorry—"

He broke off abruptly. There was a queer lump in his throat, and his eyes were shining.

"Thank you—it's very kind of you. Won't you come in?"

"Oh no, no! . . ."

"You can talk to me as well inside the house as out," said Mrs. Welby; "besides, it's raining—you're getting wet. Do come in, Mr. Wingrave."

He entered the hall, and she closed the door very quietly. Above his head there hung a small oil lamp, which cast a scant and obscure illumination upon the scene. The hall was small and square, the floor covered with a worn linoleum. The walls were whitewashed, and an oak chest and a couple of chairs completed the furnishing, indeed there was little room for anything more. Everything was worn and old, but very neat and scrupulously clean.

Eustace followed Mrs. Welby into a small room on the right. There was no fire, and it felt chilly. He saw a great many books, although none of them looked very new, some chairs, a sofa, a polished table, flowers in pots and vases. A curious old inlaid bureau of Venetian workmanship was the only piece of apparent value; probably it had formed part of Mrs. Tresham's Italian inheritance.

"I shan't call Nella," said Mrs. Welby; "she's lying down, and I want her to sleep if she can. She's tired—she was up all last night."

"She was none the worse for her drive down to Llyn?"

"Oh no, when anything's got to be done Nella never thinks of herself. She was simply splendid last night."

"Yes, yes . . . I heard."

"The funeral will be on Monday. And Mrs. Dyrham wants her to go and stay with her for a bit after that. She asked her to go at once, but Nella refused. Between ourselves, she'd rather be here."

"I'm sure she would. But perhaps a little change . . ."

"She doesn't like the thought of leaving me here alone. Not that I should be nervous, but we don't keep a servant—Nella and I do all the work between us. I'm afraid, though, we shall hardly be able to afford this cottage now. Nella means to ask Mr. Soames to take it off our hands. I shall be sorry to go away," she added.

"I'm sure Soames will do all he can."

"Yes, but he's away now, and we can't find out when he'll be back. People have been very kind, especially Mrs. Dyrham—she came over directly she heard the news, to ask if she could be of any use. Wonderful for her on such a wet day, though she had the closed car. She took Father Sheldon back to Llyn—we were really quite puzzled how to send him—I couldn't bear the thought of Nella's driving him back. Poor child—she broke down when it was all over. You never saw her with her mother, Mr. Wingrave. It was a wonderful devotion—they were more like sisters, and yet you would have thought sometimes that Nella was the little mother! Such care she used to take of her."

Her eyes filled with tears. She looked older to-day, and worn with sudden grief. He could guess the measure of her own devotion to the dead woman.

"Mrs. Dyrham will perhaps see that Miss Tresham doesn't want for anything, in the future?" he asked. Maddening anxiety upon this point assailed him. He pictured the two women alone, adrift, practically penniless.

"Yes, but she's a very firm woman—she likes things done in her own way or not at all. Still, Nella's fond of her, and I'm thankful to think that if the worst comes to the worst she's got a good friend and a place to go to. But Nella's an independent little mortal, and she isn't worldly—she wants so little."

"I don't think Mrs. Dyrham's a Catholic, is she?"

"No—but she's always associated a great deal with Catholics—she was a great friend of old Mrs. Chittenden's—the people who had Pendre before your father bought it. I think Mrs. Chittenden, who was a very holy woman, used to have hopes that she might be converted. She was very young then, and Mrs. Chittenden was old, but there was a great friendship between them. However, Mrs. Dyrham's never come over, though she admires the Church very much, and of course she's quite tolerant. And she was very fond of Mrs. Tresham—it's been a blow to her too. You see, it was so very sudden. Mrs. Tresham had been ill for a long time, but she didn't seem worse yesterday—she got up as usual. Then about midnight she had this sudden attack. Luckily Nella was sleeping in the room with her—she'd done that lately for fear she should want anything."

Eustace felt an inward gratitude to Mrs. Welby for reconstructing so much of the happenings of last night for him. She seemed to take it for granted quite simply, that her recital would interest him. Her mechanical matter-of-fact voice robbed the story, too, of its more poignant characteristics. Yet, even while she was speaking he could not help remembering that she had probably lost the best friend she had in the world, and that her own future must be plunged in uncertainty. But she did not seem to have any wish to dwell upon this aspect of the case; her thoughts were full of Nella, and her single definite aim was apparently to "keep up" for Nella's sake. She brushed her tears away abruptly, as if she were ashamed of displaying even this much of human weakness.

"My mother sent a message to Miss Tresham to tell her how very sorry she was—to ask if there was anything she could do to help—" said Eustace.

"It's very kind of Lady Pendre, and I'll tell Nella," said Mrs. Welby, with a distinct touch of dryness in her tone.

For had they not been living for more than two years at Glen Cottage, during which time Lady Pendre had taken no notice of them at all? She had almost seemed unaware of their existence, yet that younger girl of hers would have made a nice campanion for Nella in a neighborhood that boasted of so few young people.

Nevertheless, it didn't seem quite fair to blame Eustace Wingrave for his parents' sins of omission; he had a nice face, with a very kind steady look about the eyes, and he seemed really anxious to obtain news of Nella. Hadn't he walked some miles in the rain to inquire for her? And secretly Mrs. Welby wished that romances really happened in real life as they did so easily between the covers of novels. She sighed . . . .

"We are going to London on Saturday," said Eustace, "all of us except my father. I expect we shall be away about two months."

All of a sudden he felt that by going away just now, he would lose sight of Nella forever. If she and Mrs. Welby left Glen Cottage it might be that they would move away from the neighborhood altogether, and it was quite possible that he might not even be able to discover their whereabouts. The thought filled him with sadness. And yet if he had seen Nella this evening—of all evenings—what could he have said to her? She was almost a stranger to him, and now the recent tragic loss she had sustained, her own great grief, would surely set an infinite distance between them. He of all men had least right to approach her now with words of consolation and sympathy. It was impossible for him to dissociate himself utterly from his family in the matter—he couldn't explain to her now, how deeply he regretted their action. . . .

With his own future so nebulous, so uncertain, what could he say? And it was not, assuredly, the moment for words of love. Nella would certainly refuse to listen to them.

"You must tell her that I came," he said presently, "and that I've been thinking of her all day. I was there at Mass, you know, though I didn't of course realize till afterward that it was for Mrs. Tresham. Father Sheldon told me." He lowered his voice. "Mrs. Welby, I'm only a heretic, but I'm so thankful I was there."

He fixed his great burning eyes upon her.

"Perhaps you won't always be a heretic," she observed calmly.

"I'm afraid it would be very difficult for me to be anything else. When I think of my father, it seems impossible."

"Is he so very prejudiced?"

"Bitterly prejudiced. Almost as if he had some grudge—"

"Perhaps he has—one never knows. People often come into collision with the Church, you know. And then they hate her—just for her strength—her changeless attitude."

2

She had hardly finished speaking when the door opened and Nella herself came into the room.

Eustace was so startled, so embarrassed, that he rose to his feet and stood there tongue-tied. What would she say when she found him there?—what indeed would she think of him for coming at all, intruding thus upon her sacred grief? Panic seized him; he longed to escape.

She was very pale, and looked as if she had been crying. But her lips parted in a wan little smile as she held out her hand to him and said: "I thought I heard voices."

Her voice was natural, though it sounded a little tired. Her bright abundant hair was slightly disheveled. Eustace had never seen her without a hat before, and he felt as if he were looking at her from an entirely new angle.

"Mr. Wingrave—how kind of you to come!"

"I came to ask after you," he stammered, "and Mrs. Welby invited me to come in. I am going now—"

"No, don't go," said Nella. "Sit down and stay a little longer."

"But I'm intruding—I oughtn't to be here." He felt the horrible awkwardness of the situation. Oh, why had he ever come? Even so, he had never intended to enter the house—that was entirely Mrs. Welby's fault. . . .

But Nella was simple in her grief. And all day she had been very busy, seeing first one person and then another, occupied with the dreadful practical side of the funeral arrangements. Thus her loss, which had only taken place a few hours ago, seemed to be centuries old. Long years steeped in the heaviness, the weariness, of sorrow. She had never felt so physically tired in her life; she was too weary almost, to be conscious of pain. That mute white presence upstairs seemed to rebuke her—for the first time in all her twenty years—for her hardness of heart, her want of love. . . .

"Don't go," she said again, seeing him hestitate, "Welly and I are only frightfully tired."

She leaned back in her chair. His presence did in some obscure way comfort her. It seemed even to break up that frozen calm of hers—to thaw the ice that encompassed her heart, just as if there were something warm and glowing in his sympathy.

She had already seen Mrs. Dyrham and one or two other people, all kind in their respective ways, eager too with offers of help. Mrs. Dyrham had even wept a little, Nella had envied her those facile tears. But Eustace' presence made her want to cry like a little tired helpless child.

Mrs. Welby left the room. The presence of a third person could only conduce to constraint and platitudes. Besides, she had things to do, domestic duties to perform. The supper, for instance . . . And Nella mustn't be allowed to take her usual part in the proceedings. She couldn't eat, poor child, but a good cup of tea would warm her. She must go to bed early. Mrs. Welby had a practical nature; she liked to be occupied; she didn't disdain hard and prosaic tasks. Her pots and pans were a refuge when anything went awry. And to-night the thought of Nella's future preoccupied her.

If only this young Wingrave, who seemed to have taken such a fancy to Nella, had been an ordinary young man, not somebody's only surviving son, heir to a great property and to a new title! These new people always wanted their sons to marry into the old families. They asked for that rather than money. It was a pity, too, that Lord Pendre should avowedly detest the Catholic Church, detest it, too, in such manner that his enmity seemed to betray a bitter personal grudge.

Left alone, Eustace and Nella sat in silence in the chilly quiet room. The small lamp that stood on one of the tables gave such a wan furtive illumination that it seemed to dispense shadows rather than light, and it made the girl look almost ashen pale. Her eyes were sunken and heavy. Her little hands were clasped inertly in her lap. Her only coherent thoughts were, however, connected with Eustace. She seemed to be saying to herself: "I'm glad he came. I'm glad Welly made him stop."

If she had paused for a moment to consider the slightness of her acquaintance with him, the little they knew of each other his presence must at once have seemed equivocal and ambiguous in that house of mourning. But she was only able to realize in a vague way that he had come to offer his sympathy and that he didn't seem at all like a stranger. She envied Vicky Wingrave for having such a brother.

Presently she said:

"I hope you're not cold? It's cold in here."

"I'm not cold, thanks. But you—"

"I don't feel anything," she answered.

The cold was in her heart; it could not touch her body.

"We must see each other sometimes," he said with sudden courage.

"But I think we shall be leaving here soon. Didn't Mrs. Welby tell you?"

"She said you might have to."

"I may go and live with Mrs. Dyrham for a time, but I don't want to. Only she talks of going to Rome in the autumn and I should like that. Italy was my mother's country—she always said she belonged there more than in England. I've always wanted to see it."

She looked at Eustace, and wondered if indeed they would be permanently separated in the future. She had only spoken to him once before in her life, so why should this thought intimidate her—robbing her of something of her high courage?

"I've always wanted to see Rome too," he said. "I hadn't any opportunity when I was in Italy."

"What I'm so afraid of is that Mrs. Dyrham mightn't care to have Mrs. Welby too. And I couldn't give her up. She's lived with us for such ages. And she was devoted to my mother."

It did not seem unnatural that she should be thus confiding her hopes and fears to him. Something in his grave, observant, attentive eyes encouraged her to proceed.

"When I was little—too little to do things—Mrs. Welby did everything for mother and myself. One can't forget that."

"No."

"I'm afraid, though, that she isn't *simpatica* to Mrs. Dyrham."

"But surely—" he said.

He knew the lady in question but slightly; she was not among the few intimates at Pendre. Perhaps she, too, regretted the passing of the old order, the ruthless invasion of the new. Perhaps, too, she resented the treatment meted out to her friend, Mrs. Tresham. Eustace tried to recall her—he had only seen her once or twice. In appearance she was hardly prepossessing, being of massive, almost masculine, proportions, with a formidable manner, accentuated by a deep bass voice. He judged her to be a hard upright woman, autocratic, just, but not too sympathetic perhaps. Still, she would surely be kind to Nella, and would not turn her old friend and companion, Mrs. Welby, adrift. . . .

"You see, I'm telling you things about ourselves. But you mustn't let me bore you."

"I'm not in the least bored. I'm only most awfully grateful to you for letting me be here," he assured her.

Always in his thoughts there was the wish he dared not express in words, that she should ask him to go up and see her mother. As he had never seen Mrs. Tresham he had a strong desire to do so now. It was not only a cold curiosity that prompted him; it was the wish to see Nella's mother. To know what she was like. He could form no mental picture of her at all. And he felt that to see her would in some sense bring Nella a little nearer to him.

She seemed to read his thoughts, for she leaned forward and said almost in a whisper:

"Would you like to come upstairs and see my mother before you go?"

He flushed almost guiltily.

"Yes. But not—if you'd rather not." He felt now as if he had made the request aloud, so swiftly and unerringly had she interpreted his thoughts.

"I should like you to see her," she said.

She led the way up a steep short flight of stairs. At the top there was a tiny square landing about the size of the hall, with four doors leading from it, three in front and one at the back. The little oblong building was more spacious within than one would have imagined from its modest exterior.

The silence that reigned there was complete, almost uncanny. It spoke of death.

"A nun is watching her now. Father Sheldon asked two to come from the convent at Llanthwy. You see, Mrs. Welby and I couldn't watch all the time, especially at night."

She opened the farthest of the three doors. The bed had been moved into the middle of the room and some tall candlesticks were grouped around it. By the light thrown by those pyramid-shaped flames Eustace could discern the figure of a nun, black, heavily veiled, kneeling in prayer. Her face was hidden in her hands.

But though his mind registered this impression mechanically, he felt that he had never taken his eyes from the stark white figure lying on the bed, covered with a sheet that indicated the elongated attenuated slenderness of the form beneath. He was looking at Mrs. Tresham for the first and last time. Her hands, clasping a rosary, were crossed upon her breast—the pale delicate hands of a woman forced in life to an unnatural idleness. But it was always her face that held his attention so powerfully. It was slightly emaciated but very beautiful, and had the carven look of a statue. The black lashes made two lines of dense shadow beneath the long black penciled brows. Her hair pulled back rather loosely from her low square brow was almost black. She looked absolutely Italian and quite young—almost a girl—so his thoughts now ran. Too young to be Nella's mother. But then everything had come to her early. Marriage, motherhood, widowhood, and now death. In life he thought she must have been extraordinarily beautiful and interesting-looking—a study in black and white, with the blood of two dominant races in her veins. The lips were perfectly moulded, and seemed to smile faintly as if at the sudden very simple solution of a profound mystery.

Eustace had never seen death in so perfect a guise. His one wish was that he could have heard her speak. Voices were so revealing. But he could imagine hers to have been low and soft, with perhaps a thrilling note in it.

Nella wasn't in the least like her. She must have taken after her English father. She was modern, capable, self-reliant, unafraid. . . .

Nella approached the bed, sprinkled the body with holy water, and made the sign of the Cross upon the forehead. Her eyes were very bright. She kissed the cold hands almost passionately.

Then she turned to Eustace and whispered:

"At the end she didn't suffer at all. It was over so quickly—she sank to sleep like a child."

He sensed something strongly protective in her attitude. It had been difficult sometimes to remember that she wasn't the mother—so Mrs. Welby had told him—and listening to her now, he could well believe it.

He moved forward, and bending down kissed the dead woman's hand with a kind of shy reverence and homage. He longed for her to know that he loved her daughter and hoped to marry her. If only she could have known it before she died! It might have removed from her mind any natural anxiety as to Nella's future. But he seemed hardly to have been definitely aware of it himelf until this moment. Of course he had fallen in love with Nella—had thought of her almost continuously—but the question of marriage had seemed altogether too remote when his own career was so undecided. But he felt now that he would need Nella's help to restore Pendre to its ancient splendor; she must be by his side when the first Mass was said, and the Lamp before the Tabernacle was once more lighted.

Nella was kneeling beside the nun, praying. Her face was raised a little, and the flickering light of the candles fell upon it, revealing it as very calm but paler than usual. Her bright hair showed beneath the black lace veil she had hastily put on before entering the deathchamber. It made a kind of brilliant halo about her brow.

Impelled by some force he could not explain, Eustace went across to her and knelt by her side. He could, however, only remember the little prayer in the Missal, and he said it now softly to himself:

"Eternal rest give unto her, O Lord. And let perpetual Light shine upon her . . . May she rest in peace! . . ."

They both rose and he followed Nella out of the room. Outside, the spring dusk was deepening and a thick mist hung over the woods and obliterated the sea.

"Thank you," he said, "I shall realize her better now. I wish I could have seen her when she was alive. She must have been very beautiful—she's extraordinarily beautiful now. I know how you must have loved her." His eyes were fastened upon her pityingly.

"Yes, she was beautiful and good. I'm sure she must be in Heaven now," said Nella.

They went downstairs and Nella opened the door. A great draught of damp salt air came in, and the girl stood there, drinking it in almost thirstily.

"Come out a little. I'll walk back with you," said Eustace. "I'm sure you need some fresh air."

3

It was just what she did need, for she had been in the house all day, and her head ached with the close confinement of it. She accepted Eustace' offer eagerly, only pausing to throw an old black cloak about her shoulders. On her head she still wore the black lace veil that made such a charming setting for her bright hair.

"I hope you will be able to come to the funeral," she said. "The Requiem Mass will be at Llyn on Monday at nine, and then we shall take her away to be buried with my father at Kensal Green."

"I only wish I could come. But we're leaving for London on Saturday; I'm afraid there's no chance of my being able to remain behind."

"Shall you be away a long time?"

"Two months at least."

"Two months . . . I wonder where we shall be then."

"I hope I shall find you here, or at Mrs. Dyrham's!"

She shook her head. "One can't think of going on living in the same way after this. I sometimes think I'd like to work."

They walked on toward the woods. It was not actually raining now, but the air was heavy with mist and moisture. In the deep grass of the meadows the silver moon-daisies made pale patches of light. The bracken and beech-trees showed their wonderful brilliancy of green, broken here and there by the crimson flame of a thicket of blossoming rhododendrons. There was something sweet and very fresh and pure in the air, not quite free from the salt tang of the sea.

A thrush was singing its silver-flute notes from a neighboring tree.

"We are really going away on my sister's account," Eustace continued. "She hasn't been very happy lately. You see, Mr. Soames wants to marry her, and my father is very anxious for it to take place, but she doesn't wish for it at all."

"Marry her!" She was genuinely surprised. "Your sister? But he's miles too old for her!"

"So she thinks, but my father's very keen about it, and he simply won't believe that Vicky isn't. He likes people to think as he does," he added naïvely.

"I'm glad, then, you're going to take her away. Don't let her marry him—I have an idea she'd be so very miserable—"

"Yes. Especially as she's in love with another man, but my father won't hear of that."

He was purposely showing her a glimpse of his own home life. It wasn't all so straight and smooth as she might suppose. Often people who were very badly off were inclined to think that money had the power of eliminating all temporal annoyances.

"And I'm not sure that even if I had been here I could have come to the funeral," he went on. "I'm placed rather awkwardly, you know."

"Yes. I've thought you must be. Still, Welly and I were glad to see you so often at Mass. Mother knew about it too—I told her—she was praying for you . . . And I'm sure that she's still praying," she added, very simply.

He was profoundly touched by this disclosure. He took her hand and raised it to his lips. Their eyes met, and it seemed to him that Nella's were filled with a quick, tender sympathy. Perhaps she realized that he was standing shivering upon the doorstep, envying the fortunate happy ones that were enjoying the warmth and light and welcome within. She was sorry for him, despite his great possessions; she could still find it in her heart to pity him, perhaps to pray for him. . . .

Presently she said:

"I think I ought to go in now. Mrs. Welby will be wondering where I am."

They turned back, following the narrow public foot-path that ran from Glen Cottage to North Hill Park. The air was full of the fragrance of wild-flowers, a clump of hawthorn gave forth a powerful almond-scented odor. A light breeze had sprung up now, dispersing the mist. The deep distant booming of the sea sounded more loudly than before.

At the little wooden gate leading into her garden he paused and took her hand again in his.

"Good-bye," he said quietly. "But this can't be the end, you know. We must see each other again. Don't let me lose sight of you. You—" he looked at her wistfully, "you have done so much for me. More than you've any idea of!"

Oh, it could not be without its ultimate significance in both their lives—this strange, beautiful, sad hour they had spent together! Surely, it marked an epoch for them both. They could not go away and forget each other utterly.

"Good-bye," she said.

She lingered at the gate as he walked away. Soon he was lost to sight in the blue dusk of the spring evening. Mrs. Welby's voice from within called softly:

"Nella! Nella!"

She went slowly back into the house. Eustace' visit seemed to have come and gone like a wonderful dream. She could hardly realize that it had actually happened, and yet she felt inexpressibly comforted and consoled. He had given her just the human touch—the momentary human contact—which she knew now that she had needed in her great sorrow. He had in some obscure manner identified himself with her grief.

For the first time it crossed her mind that this man perhaps loved her. This one for whom her mother had prayed. . . .

4

Since the night when Soames' inadvertent allusions to the Catholic associations and traditions of Pendre had evoked such plain and vigorous speaking from his father, Eustace had never been in any doubt as to Lord Pendre's attitude toward the Church which had begun to play such an extremely important part in his own spiritual life.

It wasn't the easy half-contemptuous intolerance common to many Englishmen; there was something deeper than that in his hostility, as of a fierce smouldering resentment and antagonism, ever ready to leap into flame at the slightest provocation. And no man, least of all his father, could betray such a deep passionate hatred without cause, and it was for this cause that Eustace vainly sought.

Had Lord Pendre ever come into contact with Catholics to his own hurt? Had he some secret personal grudge against the Church? Had it ever interfered with his own private affairs? Had he ever found himself in direct opposition to its rigid far-reaching laws? There were certain points, especially connected with marriage, upon which the Church could and did exercise authority over the non-Catholic. Such as, for instance, when she insisted that the children born of a mixed marriage should be educated in the Catholic Faith. In such a case as that, promises were exacted from the non-Catholic, and in default she refused a dispensation for the marriage to take place. And if, notwithstanding this, the ceremony was celebrated in a Protestant church, it was in her eyes no marriage at all—the conditions for the administration of the sacrament of matrimony had not been fulfilled.

Or was it possible that his father instead of being the injured one had been the injurer? Was his the somber hatred of one who had deliberately wronged another? . . .

Eustace had considered it a distinct hardship for the non-Catholic parent to be compelled to have his children educated in a faith in which he did not believe, and which perhaps he disliked. But now as he walked home through the woods that lay between Glen Cottage and his home, through glades blue with wild hyacinths, he discovered, almost to his dismay, that his mind had undergone a subtle subconscious change of which he was only just aware. That it should have been effected without his consent, almost without his knowledge, astonished him. What secret inexorable process had wrought this drastic change of attitude within him? He fought for an instant against these new convictions that had apparently lain dormant in his subconsciousness, now to be imbued with energy and activity by the scene through which he had just passed. Yet it wasn't only because of Nella, and the attraction she had had for him from the first moment of their meeting. His heart had undoubtedly gone out to her then; it was still most surely in her keeping; she was the woman he loved and whom he intended one day to marry. She would encourage and strengthen his own imperfect efforts to attain to a higher spiritual standard. But the change sprang from deeper roots than that, and he probed his heart with an almost feverish energy to discover them. He must solve the problem, now if ever, and perhaps in solving it he would attain to a clearer knowledge of himself and of his ultimate aims in life.

Suddenly, illumination came. He was back in the little bare, white-washed Catholic church at Llyn. He was himself kneeling there, filled with a quite reverent curiosity. The early hour, the few worshipers—all devout and attentive—the priest at the altar. . . .

Sursum corda . . . The bell rang. *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* . . . He could see the priest genuflecting, then lifting up with his hands the pale and shining Host for all to worship. Had he not felt from that moment that life could never be the same again? His heart had been pierced, the sword of faith had been plunged into it, violently, painfully, bringing with it the first influx of grace. Words drifted across his mind. *Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you* . . . Even now that call was in a sense a call to martyrdom. The martyrdom of the senses . . . The Holy Spirit burned its way as with a flame into the soul that was scorched and seared and wounded, yet ineffably consoled and strengthened. And because of that sharp mystical experience Eustace could see the Divine Purpose running like a thread of gold through life, making all things clear and simple, however difficult. And he saw why the Church took these elaborate precautions for safeguarding the faith of her little children, so weak, so easily led astray. Even the psychologists would tell you of the necessity of saturating the child's subconsciousness with ethical ideals, with knowledge of goodness and truth, from the first dawn of its reason. . . . In the moral or intellectual order you took no chances; how much more vital, therefore, it was to guard the child spiritually from all contact with error or heresy. . . .

His change of attitude then was deep-rooted in his new faith. He saw that it had almost unconsciously taken possession of him, permeating his life and thoughts, subtly changing his own standards and ideals. And then a sudden rush of thankfulness filled his heart. Oh, he had had no long and difficult and arduous quest—his very first gesture had received instant response! God was infinitely merciful to those who turned to Him with one pitiful entreaty for guidance into the way of truth and peace. . . .

And perhaps—he liked to think that too—he owed something to the prayers of the woman who had just died. . . .

5

In the gallery at the top of the great staircase at Pendre he met his mother. Somehow her presence to-night disturbed him; he wanted to be alone with his crowding thoughts. He needed a little solitude in which to consider the change that had come into his life, altering its aims and standards. Its connection with Nella—its probable effect upon his own destiny.

She stopped him. "Did you see her, Eustie?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Won't you come into my room and tell me about it?"

Her voice held a note of entreaty. He had the feeling that she didn't want to be left out. It was as if she guessed that something important had happened to him.

He followed her reluctantly into her sitting-room. In its beauty, its comfort and luxury, its show of pretty, delicate and costly things, it formed an almost painful contrast to the little chilly austere room in which Mrs. Welby had received him.

He tried to hide his reluctance in regard to the suggested interview. Always when he talked confidentially to his mother he had the fear that she might repeat something of it to his father. And it was for this reason that he had never given her his complete confidence. Besides, when it came to the Catholic religion he could never be quite certain whether she shared Lord Pendre's views or not. She displayed a reserve and reticence that bewildered and baffled him. Did it spring from ignorance or from too deep and poignant a knowledge? What part had it played in her life before marriage? She knew something—of that he was certain—but when he attempted to approach her, to break through the wall of ice, she shrank back as if she feared that he might hurt her. . . .

He sat there in silence. If she wished to know anything more she must question him. Otherwise he did not know where to begin nor what to tell her. Her curiosity might be confined to one or two simple points, easily satisfied. He hoped that this might prove to be the case.

"Is she very unhappy?" asked Lady Pendre, after a long pause.

So she was thinking of Nella. He was grateful to her for that; his face brightened a little.

"No—I shouldn't say that. Of course she adored her mother, and humanly speaking, it's the most frightful loss and grief that she could possibly have had. But it seemed to me—don't misunderstand me, though—that there was a great deal of joy mixed up in her sorrow. Joy for her mother's sake. . . ."

He looked at Lady Pendre eagerly, anxiously, as if entreating her to understand what was, on the face of it, so paradoxical.

She said, speaking very slowly and meditatively:

"I quite understand. You see, Mrs. Tresham must have made what Catholics call a good death. For them that is always a great consolation."

"Yes. I'm sure that's what Miss Tresham feels."

Already it was becoming unnatural for him to say Miss Tresham; she was always Nella now in his thoughts.

He relapsed into silence. His mother, too, seemed wrapped in profound thought.

Presently she looked up and said:

"Did you see Mrs. Tresham?"

"Yes." A dull flush darkened his face. "She looked very beautiful—quite young. Very white, with black hair. More Italian than English. Her daughter isn't at all like her."

"They didn't think it strange of you to go over there?"

"No—they took it quite for granted. I gave your message. I was afraid of intruding, but Mrs. Welby asked me to go in. And then Miss Tresham came down and talked to me. She came out with me for a little walk—I thought the air would be good for her. She'd been shut up in the house all day. She'd already seen one or two people. Mrs. Dyrham went over there quite early—directly she heard the news."

"And the funeral?"

"It's to be on Monday. I suppose there's no chance of my being able to stay here so as to go to it?"

"Oh, don't ask, please, Eustie," she said, in hurried entreaty.

"Would it be so very fatal?" he inquired cynically.

"It would displease your father. And just now—when everything's so unusually difficult—"

"He is creating the difficulties," said Eustace, rather mercilessly. "Why can't he accept Vicky's decision?"

"He thinks he knows best," she answered.

Eustace rose from his seat, and stood looking down upon his mother.

"I have a question to ask you," he said.

She waited. Her heart sank a little. Sensitively she divined the trend of his thoughts and aspirations to-night. And always, always, she told herself now, she had known that he would be the one . . . She felt that she had known it even when she held him as a tiny baby in her arms, and he had seemed to look at her with reproachful, accusing gaze as if she had deliberately withheld something from him—something that it was his right to possess. None of her other children had ever looked at her like that. She had tried to believe that it was only her imagination, but she could remember that one day his nurse had said to her: "What a queer way he has of looking at you, madam. . . ."

"How do you know so much about the Catholic religion, Mother?" he asked.

She had felt it coming, that pitiless, relentless question.

"I . . . read a great many books about it at one time," she answered evasively.

She knew then that what he had wished to say to her was: "Were you ever a Catholic yourself?" But his sense of justice was too strong to permit of his putting such a "leading" question to her. And perhaps, too, he would not dare run such a risk of wounding her.

"I must go. It's getting late. It's time to dress. Your father will soon be back."

She rose and slipped out of the room, which communicated with her bedroom. No, she could not let him say the words which were trembling on his lips. But her very silence must convey the truth to him as surely and inexorably as any speech could do. . . .

She was trembling from head to foot. He had so nearly elicited the truth from her. But now she realized that if he ever knew it, it would be difficult for him to forgive her, to exonerate her. Would he not look upon her sin with horror—the horror which a new-made convert was bound to feel? She would forfeit his love—the love that meant so much to her.

She sat there, crouching on the sofa, growing cold with dismay and fear. The mills of God grind slowly. In her case they had been grinding for twenty-six years, and now the distant, dull echo of them had become audible to her. . . .

6

She had not been sitting there very long when she heard a knock at the door. It was almost a relief to her when, in answer to her "Come in," the door opened to admit her husband's figure.

"Well, Giselda! I'm rather late, but I got delayed. Has anything happened to-day?"

He had been gone since the early morning, and perhaps he had not heard the news. She said quietly: "Mrs. Tresham died this morning. She had a sudden heart attack."

"Really? Well, I hope now they'll leave the neighborhood altogether!" he remarked.

"Hugo—I want you to know that Eustace went over to Glen Cottage this afternoon."

"Went over to Glen Cottage. Well, of all the —! What on earth for?"

"To see Miss Tresham."

"But he hardly knows her! She must have thought it frightful cheek of him to intrude upon her at such a moment!"

"I don't think she did, though."

He frowned; the black brows looked very formidable.

"Do you mean to tell me that he's been in the habit of going to see her? That there's anything between them?" His voice quivered with indignation.

"No—I'm sure he's only spoken to her once before. The day her car broke down on the Llyn road. But, Hugo—" She looked at him appealingly.

"Well, what is it?" Though he spoke impatiently, his face softened a little.

"You mustn't blame me or think it's my doing if Eustace. . . ." She paused. Even now it was going to be more difficult to tell him than she had feared.

"What about Eustace?"

"If he should be the one. . . ."

"The one?"

"To become a Catholic. Oh, I've always felt it was bound to come out in one or other of them . . . perhaps in all! And I can't see him going that way without warning you—"

In the silence that followed, she could almost hear her own heart beating.

He burst forth angrily:

"If Phip had lived, Eustace might have done any d—fool thing he liked! He was a younger son. But now—I'm not going to have it. Giselda—you must make that clear to him! He shall never have Pendre if he does. I've rescued it from Catholic hands, and it shan't go back to them with my consent. Eustace'll only ruin his own future."

"If he's really serious he won't mind about that. And I think he is serious."

"He's been talking to you about it?"

"He asked me a few questions. Of course I didn't tell him anything. I don't want to lose his love . . . And then going there to-day, hearing about Mrs. Tresham's death, has impressed him very much."

"It's that girl's doing!" exclaimed Lord Pendre, with rising anger.

"No—to be fair to her, I don't think it is. Eustace was thinking very deeply about religion when he first came back. And quite by chance, it seems—if such things ever are chance—he has been led to consider the claims of the Catholic Church. . . ."

"I should have thought for your own sake you would have tried to keep him off that," he said ironically.

"I've done nothing, one way or the other. But even for my own sake—at the risk, too, of losing his love and even of his finding out all there is to know—I'd rather he became a Catholic."

He was silent. Did she regret? Did she feel remorse? All these years he had believed that the old claims of conscience had been lulled permanently to sleep. Wasn't all that he had so abundantly given her sufficient to compensate for the loss of those things he had taken away?

"I shan't speak to him!" he said fiercely. "He's never done me the honor of listening to any of my wishes! But if you like, you can tell him just what I've said. I'll have no Catholics here. I won't have him in the firm if he becomes one! I shall leave Pendre to Barbara's boy. He'll find himself pretty hard up, and he'll have to look to himself to earn his own living. It seems a hard thing to say, but I have sometimes wondered why Phip wasn't the one to be allowed to survive!"

She glanced up quickly and said:

"Perhaps it was for this very reason. I've always felt that some day I should have to atone. I used to hope and pray, Hugo, that one of my children might fill the gap made by my . . . my apostasy. . . ."

Yes, she had voiced it now—that terrible word that forever haunted her.

He stared at her. What strange thoughts she had, morbid thoughts that could give even to him—the most prosaic and hard-headed of business men—a sense of misgiving that almost amounted to a vaguely-formulated superstition. The gap caused by her own apostasy. . . .

"Don't you ever think that God may be against us in this?" she said, lifting her dark eyes fearlessly to his face. "Don't you think that Eustace' conversion might be a special grace—a favor—a mercy? . . . Oh, wouldn't it be a sign of that mercy if one of my children were permitted to become a Catholic—to light the Lamp that used to burn here before the Tabernacle?"

His face grew rigid.

"Your Church did her best to separate us. Once I thought it was going to win. But I fought it then and I'm going to continue to fight it now. Don't make any mistake about that!"

"You mean—even if I were dying?" Her voice faltered, and her eyes were wide with fear. She thought of Nella Tresham driving down at frantic speed to Llyn in the dark early hours of the spring morning to fetch the priest, leaving her dying mother so that she might be the means of securing for her the last most holy Rites of the Catholic Church.

"If you die as you've lived, Giselda, my darling, that'll be good enough for me," he answered, taking her hand in his and holding it closely, firmly.

"But will that be good enough for Almighty God?" she cried, almost wildly.

He sat down beside her on the sofa, holding her hand, trying to soothe her. Never before had he seen her in such a strange state of mental exaltation, and he felt almost afraid of the consequences. That ass of a boy had been upsetting her—bringing her back, no doubt, idle gossip of Mrs. Tresham's last moments! . . .

But always he had been able to quiet these scruples of hers, to dominate them, and at least he could tell himself that where she was concerned, his methods had invariably been kind and patient. But now she seemed to be crying out for something he could not and would not give her. Ancient associations and memories and traditions held her strongly in their grip, and he felt that to fight them adequately, he would require all his strength and perhaps even all his love. For were they not things that, pushed to their uttermost limit, had still the awful power even now to separate them perhaps forever? . . .

He put his arms round her, his hard powerful arms, and drew her close to him, so that her dark head was against his shoulder. But he had never felt so far from her. Her spirit was being alienated from him, and how could he call that faithless that was supremely faithful to an earlier, more exigent ideal? . . .

They sat there in silence. He was thinking bitterly of Eustace—this son who had always been rebellious and troublesome, and who was now contemplating a final and irrevocable act of mutiny. What was passing in his turbulent, undisciplined young mind? To become a Catholic—to marry Nella Tresham—perhaps having in view the hope of relighting that long extinguished Lamp at Pendre? But that at least he should never do. . . .

Twenty-six years ago Lord Pendre had fought the Catholic Church for the possession of the woman he wished to marry—Giselda Kelsey. And he had won. Was this young son of theirs to be permitted to revive memories that would inevitably torture his mother's always sensitive conscience? Would his own ultimate defeat come perhaps through the hands of Eustace?

Lord Pendre clasped his wife a little more closely, as if indeed he were holding her back from some unseen but very real peril. He tried to reassure himself that these fears were but idle. His wife was his, body and soul. . . . Nothing could separate them now.

CHAPTER XIV

Reappearance of Martin Sedgwick

1

EUSTACE was walking along the Brompton Road one Sunday afternoon, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned his head sharply, and saw a tall, fair, boyish-looking young man whose blue eyes were regarding him whimsically.

"Dreaming, as usual, Wingrave?"

"Sedgwick! Where did you spring from? I thought you were in Malta!"

"So I was till a few weeks ago. But now I've managed to wrangle something out of them at the War Office, so I shall be in London for a year or two."

"I'm very glad to hear it. Where are you staying? You must come and see us. But we've been up two months already and I expect we shall soon be going back to Pendre."

"We?" Martin looked at him interrogatively.

"My mother, Vicky and I."

"Vicky's here, in London?"

"Rather. Where are you going now, Martin?"

"I'm going to the Oratory. Be a sport and come along, too."

They walked on in silence. Then Sedgwick said:

"Did Vicky tell you that we met at Pendre last winter? It was just before you came back, I remember. But I'm always unlucky—your governor spotted me at the station. Was there—much of a row?"

"I believe there was. But it was over by the time I got back." Eustace grinned reminiscently.

Martin's young buoyant presence gave him a renewal of hope for his sister's happiness. Just lately there had been talk of his father coming up to London for a few days and bringing Soames with him. Lord Pendre was more than ever resolved that the marriage should take place; he had quite persuaded himself that Vicky wished for it, and had now almost succeeded in inducing Ernest to believe this too.

One never knew, so Eustace' thoughts ran, how far Vicky could be counted upon to hold out. And lately, too, it had seemed that Martin had passed out of her life forever. It might even be that he didn't want her any more. . . .

"How is she?" asked Martin.

"You must come and see for yourself. We shall find them in at tea-time."

"All right. I'll come back with you after Benediction. But I'm afraid I shall be less welcome than ever now. You see, when I was in Malta I became a Catholic."

"A Catholic?" Eustace looked at him with something of envy.

"Yes—I'd a great pal in the trenches who was one, and he got wiped out. There was only just time to fetch a priest, and he made me stay with him all the time. I saw then it was the only way to die, even if it made living more difficult. However, it doesn't, as a matter of fact—it makes everything much easier. My sisters have been frightfully decent about it, I'm thankful to say. So many converts seem to have a perfect hell of a time."

"I'm most awfully glad," said Eustace.

"Glad? Why, I imagined you were all dead against it! I thought it might even make a difference to Vicky."

"I'm not at all against it. In fact, I've been rather mixed up with it myself lately. I can't tell you any more just now, but I'm up against it, and I feel pretty rotten sometimes!"

"Then you really think Vicky won't mind?"

"I'm pretty sure she won't. But, Martin—"

"Yes? What is it? Has anything happened?"

"I ought to tell you that my father's trying to arrange a marriage between her and Soames. You remember that chap over at Moth Hill?"

"Remember him? I should think I did. Why, he must be twice her age! Vicky'd never look at him."

He spoke with smiling confidence. Yet once he had felt jealous of Soames, because he lived so near Pendre, and could see Vicky whenever he wished. He was always welcome—he was a favorite of Lord Pendre's.

"She won't, of course, if she's sure of you!"

"But of course she's sure of me. What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, she hasn't heard a word of you all these months, and I can tell you that very strong pressure is being brought to bear."

Martin looked grave. "But she's such a child!" he expostulated.

"Anyhow, the governor's dead set on it. That's why we've stayed in London longer than usual. My mother did that—to keep her away. She was so miserable about it all, and I'm never sure if she'll be able to hold out or not."

"But, Eustace—why didn't you write and tell me? I'd have got leave and come back like a shot. He simply can't force her into a marriage against her will."

"I wouldn't put it past him," rejoined Eustace, grimly, "and then Soames is awfully keen. She refused him, but then he's never been allowed to believe that she meant it seriously."

"I wish I'd known," said Martin.

Something of Eustace' uneasiness communicated itself to him. He longed to go straight to Vicky this very minute and carry her off out of danger.

Rapidly he reviewed the position. He would certainly be a thousand times more ineligible, in Lord Pendre's opinion, in his quality of Catholic than he had ever been before. His income in comparison with Soames' might well be described as negligible. Everything was against him, and he couldn't even be sure of Vicky herself. What if she were weakening under this strong resistless pressure? He knew something of Lord Pendre's dominating, autocratic character. What if she were beginning to weigh the advantages of such a marriage with the brilliant worldly future it could offer to her?

Soames was not an unattractive man—Martin had before now felt sundry twinges of jealousy when he thought of him and his kind elder-brotherly attitude toward Vicky. Many very young girls had been known to fall in love with men much older than themselves. Yes, he would have to contend against this solid, serious rival, and it seemed to him that he had little to offer in comparison.

Eustace was satisfied that Martin cared for his sister. It wasn't only a passing phase. He had been wise perhaps to warn him of what was proceeding. Delay was dangerous. Lord Pendre had a firm faith in the "continual dropping." And very soon they would be returning home, when the subject would probably come up for renewed acrimonious discussion. Soames, too, might become more urgent and importunate.

"And your mother? What does she think about it?"

Eustace shook his head.

"It's difficult to say. But I don't think she wants Vicky to marry him."

They had reached the Oratory now. People were mounting the steps and disappearing into the church. Eustace and Martin went in together.

The Oratory was full of people. Above the Altar, upon a throne, the Host was visible in a gold Monstrance. The flame of innumerable candles made a blaze of glory about it, and yet it seemed to Eustace, as it had done long ago, that the Blessed Sacrament possessed a more brilliant and blinding quality of radiance than any other light that was there.

He fell upon both knees and bowed his head. Then he groped his way to a seat. He had forgotten all about Martin and did not know if he were following him or not. People made way for the young man with his white tense face and dark burning eyes. He felt almost faint with emotion. . . .

He had never before been present at Benediction, though he had seldom missed Mass on any morning since he had come to London. But his Catholic education was still incomplete, and he had never talked to Catholics, thus he was still unaware that such a service existed. And even if he had heard it named, its nature would still have been unknown to him.

Perhaps to the non-Catholic, Benediction always seems simpler and more easily comprehended than the deeper mystery of the Mass. It is a service of pure worship, and the singing, the clouds of incense that accompany it, seem to be borne up to Heaven by invisible angels.

The *Tantum Ergo* was sung; the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given to those kneeling and worshiping crowds; then a chorus of voices uttered the Divine Praises.

Blessed be God.
Blessed be His Holy Name.
Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
Blessed be His most Sacred Heart.
Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of
the Altar. . . .

Eustace heard no more. His mind dwelt lovingly upon that last phrase; he found himself lingering over the words, repeating them softly to himself as if they held a mysterious and ineffable sweetness.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar . . .

His way was quite clear now, whether he chose to follow it or not. To count the cost was to lose courage. But perhaps no one had ever entered that service, even as the most humble and obscure of doorkeepers, without being called upon to make immense sacrifices and difficult renunciations. One had to pay for the very privilege of serving. . . .

And then he thought of the joyous, satisfied look in Martin's eyes. He had been perhaps quick to respond to that first overpowering influx of grace. He had a kind of fine, reckless courage, even in moments of physical danger. Eustace could picture him flinging aside his nets, his very means of livelihood, with the careless gesture of the early Apostles.

"I've been hanging back too long," he thought.

2

Martin followed Eustace up the softly carpeted stairs of Lord Pendre's great London house. It was the first time he had ever been inside of it, and it struck him as being, if possible, a trifle more luxurious and opulent-looking than Pendre itself.

The two big drawing-rooms occupied all the front part of the first floor. They led from one to the other, and in the further one Lady Pendre and Vicky were sitting at tea. It was with a feeling of thanksgiving that Eustace observed the absence of Barbara and Pamela. They were both in the habit of visiting Lady Pendre on Sundays. There was no room for Pamela in the London house, and her headquarters now were at West Kensington, though she was not often at home.

It was simply a matter of the most extraordinary luck, Eustace thought, that they weren't there to-day—these two formidable supporters of Lord Pendre's domestic policy for ridding his house of the turbulent Vicky.

"Mother—I've brought a visitor!"

Vicky had left her seat and was already running eagerly toward the approaching figures.

"Eustace! Martin!" There was a glad note of welcome in her voice, but the words came breathlessly, almost as if she had only just succeeded in strangling a sob of relief.

Lady Pendre held out her hand. "How nice to see you, Martin."

"I wonder if she'll mind when she knows," Eustace thought, vaguely uneasy and troubled, now that he saw his mother and Martin together. But surely she would welcome him, seeing in him the man who was to save her child from a loveless hateful marriage.

But he felt that when the love of Martin and Vicky should declare itself openly and they became engaged to be married, he would inevitably acquire some definite clue as to his mother's real attitude toward the Catholic Church.

She might let him pass on into its portals without declaring her position. But she could not surely permit Vicky's marriage to a Catholic without in some sense revealing this secret of her own heart.

Vicky was very silent, now that her first joyful greeting was over. From time to time she cast furtive glances at Martin, trying to decide how much or how little he had changed. His complete restoration to health and vigor was even more noticeable now than it had been last spring at the time of their surreptitious meeting in the Pendre woods. The full strength and vigor of early manhood gave even to his physical beauty—always so wonderful in her eyes—an added touch of perfection. Perhaps she had liked him better when he was weak and helpless and suffering; she had never felt that strange fear of him then which made her dumb in his presence now. Often in those first months of separation he had seemed a rather shadowy figure, embodying, however, a standard, an ideal, compared with which Ernest Soames fell most lamentably short. Seeing him now so unexpectedly, when she had almost given up hope of ever being allowed to do so again, produced in her mind confused impressions, foremost among which was the resolution that she could certainly never marry anyone else. His presence revived many memories, some beautiful, some terrible. The days at Pendre when he had hardly been able to endure the pain of his wound—a battered but heroic figure from whom she had learned what fortitude and self-control under suffering could mean. . . . That day when he had first kissed her. . . . The fatal morning when her father had discovered his letters and confiscated them, forbidding her ever to correspond with him again. She had grown to care for him very gradually, but the emotion had sunk deeper than she had known, into a heart so starved of love.

When tea was over, Lady Pendre said:

"I want to have a talk with Martin. I'll send for you both later."

Vicky felt defrauded. She didn't want to lose a single moment of his company. They always had so much to say to each other, even when he didn't want to talk about marrying her. And perhaps he wouldn't be able to come again very soon. But she did not dare voice the doubt that was tormenting her now, and she was everlastingly grateful to Eustace because he did so.

"Martin mustn't go away, though, without our seeing him again," Eustace said. "Remember, I was the one to find him!"

He smiled at his mother, giving her a look of perfect confidence that touched her.

"I'm hoping perhaps that Martin will stay and dine with us," Lady Pendre answered.

On the broad sumptuous landing, with its velvet-soft carpets and gleaming statuary and splendid palms, Vicky seized her brother's arm.

"Oh, Eustie, do you think she's going to tell him about Mr. Soames? I feel as if I couldn't bear it—Martin's inclined to be jealous of him—he told me so once!"

"He knows all about it. I told him myself," answered Eustace.

"Oh, you shouldn't have! He'll believe just as Barbara does, that I *want* to marry Ernest!"

"Don't be afraid—he's not going to believe any fool thing like that." He put his arm lightly about her. "I've been having a long talk with him. And it's up to you to marry him if you want to."

"Is it?" Her hand increased its pressure upon his arm. "He is splendid, isn't he, Eustie? You do like him, don't you?"

"Yes—he's an awfully good sort. I believe you'd be happy with him. But there's something you'll have to know—it may make a difference—he's become a Catholic, Vicky."

They had gone now into a little sitting-room down the long passage to the left. It was one their mother often used when she was in London, and it was full of her things. Books—photographs of her children—bits of china and furniture that she had collected from time to time.

"A Catholic?" Vicky was thoroughly sobered now. "But that'll make Dad hate him more than ever."

Oh, how hopeless it all was! She knew that very soon they would all go back to Pendre, and she would be forced, for peace' sake, to marry Ernest Soames. She couldn't go on fighting. And her father was less likely than ever now to give his consent to her marriage with Martin. This would put the crowning point upon his ineligibility.

"But it won't make you hate him, will it, Vicky?"

"Oh, I should love him just the same if he were a Mohammedan!" she answered lightly.

Eustace took her hand and held it firmly. He wanted to give her courage and confidence to be true to this love which seemed to him such a splendid thing. She was such a child still, and yet when she spoke of Martin there was something mature and womanly about her.

Vicky was crying now in a quiet restrained fashion; she was both happy and sorrowful.

"Now he's a Catholic he mayn't want to marry me any more," she said, after a brief reflection.

"Perhaps he'd like you to be one too."

"I should never be good enough. They're frightfully strict. I wonder why he did it."

Eustace told her as much of Martin's conversion as he knew himself.

"I feel as if he can't care for me now," she said, with a kind of bitter hopelessness.

"But he does," said Eustace. "Vicky—you've got to be strong and brave about this. Don't throw away your own happiness. If you care for Martin—and make very sure you do—don't let anything come between you."

"There are so many things that have come between us already, through no fault of mine," she said. Were not the Powers, as represented by her father, Barbara and Pamela, pitilessly ranged against herself and Martin? She was not even sure of her mother's support, though her manner to him this afternoon had given her strong grounds for hope. But the thought that she and Martin were even now having a long and confidential talk filled her with a kind of dismayed anxiety.

Still, Eustace' words had a quieting and comforting effect upon her. And the apparently hopeless situation was at least illuminated by the golden certainty of Martin's love. Eustace felt that it wasn't likely his encounter with Vicky that day would do anything but consolidate and confirm it. She was looking especially pretty in her white summer dress; she had improved in looks, he thought, since the winter. She had the charm of something fresh and wild and essentially young—a poetical charm. She was as graceful, too, in her movements as a little light fairy. Eustace felt pretty sure that Sedgwick couldn't be blind to this enchantment.

"You must go forward without thinking of the difficulties and obstacles," he told her, thinking perhaps of his own path—so clear and simple and yet so filled with difficulties.

"I'll try, Eustie. And I'm quite sure of one thing—I do care an awful lot for Martin. Now if they were only to insist upon my marrying *him* they'd soon find out how docile I can be! We could laugh at things together, just as we used to at Pendre when they were looking frightfully black, and it seemed to chase them away. Now if I ever had the bad luck to be Mrs. Soames, I should always have to be on my best behavior and pretend I was at least forty!"

They both laughed. Still, the interview within those closed doors was a lengthy one, and could not be contemplated without some misgiving.

"Of course he'll tell Mummie he's become a Catholic," she whispered; "I'm afraid she won't like that much. I wish he wasn't so very frank and straightforward, but he'll never leave her to find out that for herself. Now if he were to say straight out in the first instance that he wanted to marry me, he could make any revelations he liked afterward!"

"You seem to take it for granted that they're discussing you, my child," observed Eustace, teasingly.

"But of course they are! What else should they have to talk about in secret like that? Oh, Eustie—I do wonder what she's saying!"

"You might trust her. You know she's utterly opposed to your marrying Soames. Between them, they ought to find a way out."

3

In the drawing-room Lady Pendre was saying to Martin:

"I didn't know there was any hope of your getting leave this summer. Vicky told me you'd gone to Malta. It was your excuse, wasn't it?—for coming down to see her at Pendre in the spring."

"Yes. I was sorry afterward that I'd gone. But I felt I couldn't go away like that for an indefinite time without seeing her again. I shall be settled now in London for a bit—I've got a job at the War Office."

"Have you? I'm very glad to hear it."

"Later I mean to try for the Staff College."

He had always liked Vicky's mother, and had found it easy to talk to her. Sometimes, it is true, he had secretly blamed her for yielding her child up so completely to her husband's tyrannical authority. Vicky was, in his opinion, utterly mismanaged, and he had even wondered how she had contrived to remain so lovable through it all.

"There's some talk—you may have heard it—of Vicky's marrying Ernest Soames."

"Eustace told me. But of course it's absurd unless she's out to marry pots of money, which I know she isn't. Soames is a very decent chap, and his shooting's top-hole, but he's old enough to be her father."

"He's certainly a great deal older. But my husband wishes for the marriage."

"And do you wish for it?" he asked, bluntly.

"No."

It was the first time he could ever remember hearing her express a definite and decided opinion.

"Does Vicky?" he asked. There was a hint of anxiety in his tone, as if he feared that Eustace' assertions to the contrary, were not based upon sure knowledge.

"No. So far she's refused to entertain the idea. But she's very young, Martin. She's always had to obey her father. The old influence may prove too strong."

She looked at him now with something of appeal. He *must* help Vicky, if he really cared for her—he must! But did he care? Or was she still in his eyes only the pretty charming child?

He groped blindly. "Has this got anything to do with me?"

"I don't know. You must tell me."

"I've asked Vicky to marry me. But twice I've been warned off—I didn't know what to do. I felt it was only making trouble for Vicky if I tried to see her as I did last spring."

"Do you care for her?" she asked.

"Care for her? My dear Lady Pendre! Why, I've loved her for more than two years—I know it sounds absurd—she was such a child at the time. Why, when I first went away I used to think of that phrase about eating one's heart out. Don't think me sickeningly sentimental, but it came to that!"

There was silence. Then he exclaimed impulsively:

"I want to marry Vicky—as soon as possible. I've got this job—we can manage all right on what I have. You'll help me, won't you?"

"Yes. I want to save her from this other marriage."

"I'd make her happier than Soames ever could, with all his money! That dried up chap—and Vicky!"

"There's something else," she said. "If you find that Vicky cares for you it isn't likely that my husband would do anything for her. He's a very rich man, and generous when he likes people and when they do things to please him. If Vicky had married Ernest, he was ready to do for her just what he did for Barbara. But I think it would be a very long time before he'd forgive Vicky for marrying you."

"I've got heaps for us both," replied Martin, cheerfully. "We shan't be rich, but we shan't starve. Besides, I'd ever so much rather not be dependent on Lord Pendre after those two letters I've had from him."

"She's such a child that I wish there had been no question of her marriage for another year or two. But I'm certain that Mr. Soames could never make her happy, and I'm afraid when we get back to Pendre that she may yield to persuasion. . . ."

"There's another thing I must tell you about myself," said Martin. "I've told Eustace—he didn't seem to see any objection."

"What's that?" she asked, a little anxiously.

"Well, you see, I've become a Catholic. Would that make any difference to you?"

He raised his blue eyes and looked at her with a penetrating, inquiring gaze. And it seemed to him, as he looked at her, that his little confession had disturbed something of the icy calm of her face. She was paler than before—or was this only his fancy?—and her hands were strained tightly together as if she were making a strong effort at self-command.

"Would it?" he repeated, and his voice was a little harsh with anxiety. When she knew this, she would perhaps have no further wish that he should marry her daughter.

She answered slowly: "It would make it all the more impossible for my husband to forgive Vicky for marrying you."

"But you—" insistently—"what would you say?"

Oh, she had always been an enigma to him—this beautiful woman who was Vicky's mother. She had seemed such a cipher in her own house, and during his first days at Pendre he had even formed the erroneous opinion that she was indifferent to her surviving children, especially to Vicky. She seemed to have so little voice in their upbringing. She was always, as it were, detached, aloof, eternally enigmatic.

"I must know," he said.

She answered evasively: "It could make no possible difference to me!"

"Then you're not against it?"

"Did you think I should be?"

She was determined to parry his questions. He remembered then almost inconsequently that Philip Wingrave had once told him that he and his brother and sisters had been educated practically without religious instruction, and that their mother had never spoken to them on the subject at all. Was she, then, perfectly indifferent? Did she possess no faith of any kind herself? . . .

"I thought you might be influenced by Lord Pendre's attitude toward the Catholic Church."

"Oh, then you know—?"

"I've heard him speak of it once or twice, so I know what his opinion of it is. I suppose I'd already begun to think of it, for I remember it used to make my blood boil even then! One doesn't really know the exact moment it takes hold of one. But I beg your pardon—I oughtn't to have spoken like that to you."

He was remorseful, but she did not seem to be at all offended; in fact, he was not quite sure if she had heard him or not.

"Perhaps Vicky won't want to marry me when she knows. She'd have to make promises!"

"I know—" she interrupted him now breathlessly. Her face wore a look of definite anguish, as if he all unconsciously were subjecting her to a subtle form of torture.

"You see how it is, Lady Pendre, even if it meant losing Vicky—which is unthinkable—I couldn't go against the Church. But it does affect her, of course, tremendously."

"Of course it does. . . ."

Not even to win Vicky? There was something stronger in his life then than this young ardent love. Something that controlled him utterly, that claimed without question his first loyalty and his first love. *Si scires donum Dei . . . If thou didst know the gift of God. . . .*

"She might not care about making such sacrifices!" He held his head high, and there was a touch of arrogant defiance now in his bearing.

Was he giving her blow upon blow? He felt that his words were slowly but surely demolishing that calm of hers, and that presently he would penetrate to the very heart of that woman who attracted him so strongly, and yet in a sense repelled him too.

He said to himself: "She knows something. What does she know?"

"You could ask her." Her voice was cold.

"Of course my hope and prayer would be that Vicky might become a Catholic too," he said.

My hope and prayer . . . She was conscious of an aching desire to echo those words—she wanted to tell him that all her own hopes and prayers for Vicky tended to that same end. Her prayers? Long ago she had, alas, forfeited all right to pray.

Aloud she only said: "Of course that would be the happiest thing for both of you. Especially if there were any children. It always seems to me it must be hard upon a mother not to be able to bring up her children in her own Faith."

Their eyes met. But he did not dare to question her further. He felt the tension in every nerve. Sensitively he was aware that there were things she longed to say yet could not say. It was a relief to him when she rose and moved toward the door.

"Do you still wish to see Vicky—to speak to her?" she asked. "If not, it would be kinder to go away. . . ."

"I want to see her—now I've got your permission. I must know if she'll consent to an engagement . . . I'll explain everything."

He was so tall that she had to lift her head a little to look into his face, now they were both standing up. Such a steady strong face with all its good looks, its sunny charm. She knew him to be full of grit and endurance. She felt that she could entrust Vicky to his keeping without fear. She put her hand in his.

"God bless you, dear Martin."

She went out of the room, leaving him alone.

4

When Lady Pendre had gone, Martin Sedgwick realized that tacitly she would lend her support—whatever it was worth—to his marriage with her daughter.

She had certainly been startled at the disclosure about his change of religion, but though she had said so little, he believed that in her sight Catholicism would constitute no barrier to the said marriage. And indeed all the time he had felt somehow convinced that his words had awakened within her an emotion she had had some difficulty in repressing.

Never had he been so aware of some mystery in her life—something that was quite definitely at the root of all that seemed so enigmatic and ambiguous in her character. Had it anything to do with religion? Had it perhaps something to do with the Catholic Church? He could not tell. There were baffling complexes and repressions, and he felt, too, that her answers had been deliberately intended to mystify him still further.

He had not long to wait. The door opened and Vicky came into the room almost timidly. She knew nothing of what had passed between her mother and Martin. Lady Pendre had only said to her: "Go into the drawing-room. Martin wants to talk to you." And then as if moved by some sudden, urgent impulse she had pulled the girl toward her and kissed her with an almost passionate affection.

Martin was standing there near the window, his back turned to her. But the sound of the door opening, made him turn quickly and he went toward her. Now that the moment had actually come, Vicky felt a little afraid of him. That meeting in the Pendre woods had been to her a daring but very joyous adventure; she had gone to it with something of a child's eagerness and excitement. But Martin was changed to-day. He looked older, more stern, more determined.

"Your mother and I have been talking about you," he said.

"Yes?"

"She's been telling me there's some question of your marriage."

"Yes," she assented dully.

"Do you want to marry Soames, Vicky?" he asked.

He must absolutely clear up this all-important question before he proceeded to state his own case. The lure of money was often very strong. Vicky had been brought up to believe in the power and omnipotence of wealth. Lord Pendre was a materialist, who liked to impose his opinion upon others. And he made of wealth a god, a fetich. How far had his child escaped contamination?

"I've utterly refused to marry him! I . . . I almost hate him!" she cried. Her pale little face grew stormy; she clenched her hands. At that moment she looked very like the wild rebellious child whose personality had so intrigued him when he first arrived in a mutilated condition at Pendre.

"Then will you marry me, Vicky?" he said, moving a step nearer to her.

"They'll never let us," she said, in a hopeless tone.

"Your mother will let us right enough. She's on our side. She wasn't even against it when I told her I'd become a Catholic."

"Don't tell Dad you're a Catholic!" she exclaimed, with a bitter flippancy.

"What's it got to do with him? Your mother told me quite plainly that if we were married we mustn't look to him for any help. I'm afraid it may make an awful difference to you —you've been accustomed to so much."

He glanced significantly round at the beautiful luxurious room.

She was silent. Oddly enough it was the question of his religion that disturbed her most. He would demand a high standard of her. She knew how grim and unflinching he could be in the endurance of physical agony. He had come back changed, and the change terrified her. She wanted the old Martin—faulty, human, but so dear. Not one pledged to a difficult spiritual service. . . .

"And then my being a Catholic," he went on. "You see how hopelessly ineligible I am from every point of view."

"Oh, that wouldn't matter to me! I haven't any religion to speak of, though Eustie and I have often wished we had."

Then to his consternation, she turned abruptly away and burst into tears.

Instantly his arms were around her. "Oh, Vicky—my darling—what's the matter? What have I said?"

"Oh, it's no *good,* Martin! I know you're only trying to rescue me. You can't really care. And I'm such a beast—I should so often be perfectly horrible to you! And then you know . . . . in the end I've always had to do what Dad wants!"

He led her to the sofa, slipped his arm round her, and waited till she grew a little calmer. Of course she was overwrought and excited; she had come pretty well to the end of her tether.

"Darling, I'm not trying to rescue you," he said at last. I've loved you all the time. Ask your mother and Eustace if I haven't told them so. I was pretty hard hit when Lord Pendre's first letter came, warning me off. And the last one —after our meeting in the spring—was worse. I wrote twice to you, once from London and once from Malta, but got no answer so I suspected you'd never received my letters. And then I was afraid, too, that the question of religion might make a difficulty even with yourself. . . ."

"How could it make any difference? I'm so frightfully ignorant. Why, you might teach me, Martin!" She looked up now, smiling through her tears. The old Martin had most unexpectedly come back, and the stern, cold stranger who seemed to suspect her of a secret wish to marry Ernest Soames had vanished. "Mummie never taught us anything, you know. We used to notice, too, that she didn't like us to talk about it to her."

Lady Pendre's words came back to him with a peculiar and startling emphasis. *"It always seems to me that it must be so hard upon a mother not to be able to bring up her children in her own faith. . . ."* Her own faith? What had that faith been? Philip and Vicky had both told him of her strange refusal ever to discuss the subject of religion with her children.

Suddenly her words assumed in his mind a sinister importance. Could it be that she had betrayed her faith? Was it possible? But he thrust the thought from him, not daring to pursue it to its logical conclusion even secretly. Yet had he not always felt about Lady Pendre that there was something unexplained, lying hidden in the background of her life and thoughts? Something concealed and secret . . . . that made her shrink from all intimacy even with her own children? In their several ways they had all adored her with a kind of distant worshiping love, realizing her aloofness, her inability to descend into their lives and teach and influence them.

To Martin she had always been a woman with a secret, and all that he gathered either from herself or her children, only crystallized and confirmed this opinion.

"But perhaps you'd hate to marry someone who wasn't a Catholic?" suggested Vicky, chilled by his silence.

"What I'm hoping, you know," he answered with a smile, "is that my wife may become one."

His calmness, something that was at once strong and steady and hopeful, quieted her. With all that she had endured during those past few months, first from his own absence and silence, and secondly from those endless discussions about her matrimonial future, her nerves were in a condition of acute tension. She had felt resistless hands pulling her toward a goal she both disliked and feared. Then just as she had begun to feel her own resistance weakening, Martin had come, as if sent by Heaven, to rescue her. The reaction was inevitable, and the feeling she had for him at the moment was less perhaps love than a passion of gratitude. He imbued her with fresh courage and confidence; he seemed to belong, too, to a plane where simple, ordinary things happened. She felt that she could trust him completely, just as she trusted Eustace. He would always stand like a rock between her and all tyranny and coercion.

She put out her hand and touched his sleeve timidly. Emboldened by this little gesture Martin drew her to him and kissed her.

"Oh, Vicky darling, we're going to be terribly happy!"

"Are you sure, Martin? I feel as if Dad would never let me marry a Catholic."

"Well, we must do without his permission, then. We shall have your mother's in any case."

"And then Dad's so made up his mind that I'm to marry Mr. Soames."

"Yes, but what I want to know is what's old Soames doing? He can't understand the position at all. Someone must have lied to him."

"You see, Dad doesn't believe that I hate Ernest. He thinks I'm only making a fuss—that I mean to marry him in the end."

"Look here, Vicky, we're living in the twentieth century and you're not going to be forced to marry that blighter. Promise to marry me, and we'll manage somehow. Your mother's on our side—she as good as told me I could go ahead."

Vicky looked up at him with shy dark eyes. How easy it was to love him! And they had wanted to thrust her into a position when to love him would be a sin.

"What did Mummie say when you told her about your religion?"

"She didn't say very much—the difficulty was to get her to say anything at all. And yet, somehow, I felt that she wasn't only not against it, but that she knew something about it. Did you ever hear that she'd had leanings at any time?"

"Never. But even if she had she'd never have dared mention it to anyone. She never speaks of religion—I've sometimes thought she didn't believe in anything at all."

"I'm sure, from the way she spoke, that couldn't be the case. At least it didn't seem like that to me."

Fear and dread of what he might be going to say or ask . . . . all that had been in her lovely face this evening. But never indifference, never the easy scornful gesture of unbelief.

"Is it very difficult to be a Catholic?" Vicky asked.

"It's impossible unless you've got the faith. And when you have that it's most awfully simple and easy." He looked at her, and in his steady blue eyes there was an enthusiastic almost mystical light. "We can only obtain it by prayer or by some special grace, for only God can give it to us. His precious gift—the pearl above price."

He spoke in sobered measured tones. Then after a pause he added:

"I shall pray that you may have this grace, Vicky darling."

"Oh, I'm sure to do whatever you like," she said simply; "I'm most awfully easy to manage when I really like people."

Her naïveté drew a smile from him, and he felt it incumbent upon him to say: "Then you do really like me?"

"Very, *very* much. I always have, you know—even before I saw you. Phip told me how splendid you were. But I never thought you'd look at me."

"Then will you marry me?"

"But of course . . . ."

"Promise."

"Oh, I promise faithfully. Martin, you'll be frightfully kind to me, won't you?"

"Frightfully," he assured her with a smile.

"I do like you, Martin."

"But I shall want something more than that. You see, I love you, Vicky."

She put both her hands in his with a gesture that touched him more than he could express. "I love you, Martin. Ever, ever so much. Better than anyone in the world, except perhaps Mummie and Eustie."

"Well, that's all right as far as it goes," he said, laughing.

He realized that he must go slowly with Vicky. Her love was not to be had for the mere asking. It was a deep thing of slow and gradual but steady growth. And it was something to have won her confidence, and the same measure of love she gave to those dear ones, "Mummie and Eustie."

Lady Pendre came in presently and found them sitting there, apparently very happy and satisfied. Martin's face wore a look of intense joy, Vicky's was more subdued. They both rose and went toward her.

"I want you to be the first to know that we're engaged," Martin said. He slipped his hand into Vicky's and they stood there, side by side.

Even now the girl did not smile; her face wore a thoughtful expression, but already it seemed to have gained something of tranquillity and sweetness. Her slight small form looked almost fairy-like beside Martin's tall figure.

"I'm very glad—I know you'll make her happy," said Lady Pendre.

He bent over and kissed her hand.

"I feel I've got you to thank for this happiness," he said.

5

Much later that night, after Martin had gone, Vicky was sitting with her mother in the little room where she and Eustace had waited that afternoon.

The window was open, and outside they could see the sky above the trees and roofs, powdered with pale golden stars. The air that stole in was warm and soft. Only the faintest rumble of traffic reached their ears.

"Mummie—I don't feel as if it could be quite true. Shall I ever be allowed to marry him?"

Lady Pendre looked wistfully at her daughter.

"If you're perfectly certain that you love him."

"I do like him. I think he's perfectly splendid. And I'm not good enough for him."

"He told you that he'd become a Catholic?"

"Yes. He's going to pray for me that I may be one too. He says it's quite easy and simple when you have the faith, but you must pray for it."

Lady Pendre winced as if she had been struck. Vicky secretly wondered what she could have said to hurt her. But perhaps the thought that her daughter was going to marry a man of another religion was repugnant to her.

"Should you mind that very much?" the girl asked. "You know I haven't any particular religion."

"I shouldn't mind in the least."

Emboldened by this definite statement Vicky proceeded.

"That's what Martin told me. He said he thought that sometime or other you must have had—leanings!"

"Leanings!"

"But you don't hate it, as Dad does?"

"I don't hate it at all." Her face had recovered its frozen calm. "But this is all beside the point, dear. If you really wish to marry Martin, I must tell your father."

"He'll never give his consent."

"No, but at least it will make him realize that you couldn't possibly think of any other marriage. That'll be a point gained. Only, you must be perfectly certain that this marriage with Martin would be for your happiness. You must think it over—you're so very young. . . ."

"It's too late to think it over. I've promised Martin to marry him. I'm engaged to him—it's lovelier than I thought it would be." Her face kindled. "And as for my being young—why, how old were you when you married Dad?"

"I was eighteen—just your age. And I was nineteen when Phip was born. But, Vicky—"

"Yes, Mummie?"

"If you ever had any children they would have to be Catholics like their father. Your marriage to Martin must take place in a Catholic church. The Church is very particular about these things. Promises have to be made, and you'll be the one who'll have to make them. There are complications, you see, in a mixed marriage."

Vicky was silent, but she was listening attentively. His religion seemed to endow Martin with an almost mysterious quality that yet, somehow, deepened his essential attraction. And he had spoken of it with a very real and authentic enthusiasm. The pearl of great price. . . . He wished her to have this grace—this gift.

She said impulsively:

"I'll make any promise they want. I'm sure, though, I shall want to be a Catholic too. I shouldn't like to think there was any division between us. Only, I'm so ignorant about it. Couldn't you teach me a little, Mummie?"

As she spoke she laid her hand upon her mother's.

Lady Pendre drew her hand away sharply as if she could not bear even that slight contact. She said in a cold stern voice:

"I can't teach you anything. We must leave all that to

Martin. No doubt he could introduce you to some priest, if you really seriously wish to be instructed. I daresay he would much rather that you should be received before your marriage, if there's time. It would simplify things very much."

"Yes. I should like that best too," said Vicky.

"Being instructed doesn't put you under any obligation to be received if you feel that you can't go on. You can draw back —when you've learnt just what it all entails. But in any case you'd better know what you're doing."

"Yes," said Vicky, "I'd rather know." Inwardly she was thinking: "She *does* know. Martin was quite right. Sometime or other she must have learned about it."

Could it be that Lady Pendre had once placed herself under instruction, and then had drawn back, feeling unable to take the further and irrevocable step? What scruple perhaps of unfaith had held her back? But when and where had she ever come into contact with Catholicism? Not certainly since her marriage. . . . Yet she seemed to know what it implied in accurate detail . . . the obligations the Church imposed upon her children, safeguarding even the faith of those that were yet unborn. . . . Why did her mother exhibit a certain anxiety for this marriage to take place, despite the fact that Martin was a Catholic, and that the spiritual future of Vicky's own children was involved? And although she had spoken so coldly, so academically, Vicky felt that the matter was not one of indifference to her. It was as if she wanted for her child this contact with Catholicism. Aloof and detached as she was, always unwilling to speak to her children with the normal intimacy of a mother, and never perhaps more so than on the present occasion, Vicky was able to sense something of her deep imprisoned speechless love more acutely than ever before. . . .

The barrier of ice was still there, it is true, but it seemed to be acquiring a certain transparency across which they could see each other more clearly.

Vicky felt the strength as well as the tenderness of her mother's love—for had she not shown that love by coming to her help at a very critical juncture, breaking the tradition of so many years during which she had yielded without apparent effort to her husband's will?

She flung her arms impulsively round her mother's neck, and cried: "Oh, I love you—I don't want to leave you! I shall never be happy away from you. And when I'm of a different religion won't that separate us still more?"

She pressed her warm thin young cheek against her mother's. Lady Pendre clasped her for a moment and then gently released herself from the embrace.

"I don't think we shall feel separated on that account. Mothers and daughters are often drawn nearer to each other when the daughter marries and has children of her own. And I want you to be happy. I'm afraid you haven't always been happy at home."

"But that was never your fault," Vicky declared emphatically.

Lady Pendre rose.

"You must be going to bed—you've had a long, exciting day."

She kissed her daughter's forehead, and then slipped away into the next room.

When she was alone Lady Pendre sank upon her knees. With no help from herself, with scarcely any effort on her part, Vicky's eyes were turning for the first time toward the Catholic Church. Once she had believed that Eustace, in his restless eager quest for spiritual things, would be the first of her children to find that path. Now a door had been opened, suddenly, unexpectedly, in the life of her youngest child, who perhaps of them all needed most the discipline of faith.

Martin had evidently spoken to Vicky quite frankly about his religion. He had told her that he was going to pray for her. His great love must surely assist her in that spiritual journey.

And Lady Pendre, who more than her children had lived under the shadow that hung so heavily over the house, was able to feel at last that it had lifted a little, that a gleam of

Divine Mercy and perhaps even of pardon had pierced like a blinding ray across its darkness.

She prayed now with scalding tears: "Oh, my God, let me suffer . . . . let me expiate . . . . only give the Faith to my children, the Faith I have robbed them of. Give back to them in Thy Mercy all that I have taken away, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault!"

She uttered the words aloud in an extremity of anguish.

"Grant that these my children may know Thee in Thy One True Church . . . ."

As she knelt there, her eye fell upon a portrait of Philip in uniform. Like all the portraits of the dead it was a little faded, but it still showed him in the full beauty of his young manhood. He had died as he had lived, apart from the Church, ignorant of its consolations. For him the Way of Approach had been sedulously hidden. And whatever grace might be bestowed upon Eustace and Vicky, Lady Pendre knew that her eldest and most dearly loved child had through her own grievous fault died outside the Church. That at least was irremediable.

She rose from her knees. "I could have taught her—everything! Oh, how I wish I could have instructed her. I could have shown her all the beauty and grace . . . ."

Yes, and more than that. She could have knelt beside Vicky when she received her First Communion. In that solemn hour they might have been together. . . .

She saw her act of rebellion in its true light—she who had so often shirked the contemplation of it, trying by every means in her power to silence the voice of conscience. But now she could look back across twenty-six years and trace the deadly consequences of her sin. She saw it as a spiritual betrayal, an outrage, an insult, deliberately offered to Almighty God with her own full knowledge and consent. It was an infidelity of the soul that was a thousand times more terrible and enduring in its effects than any infidelity of the body. It was a sin against grace—against the Holy Spirit. Was there—could there be—pardon for such a sin as that, persisted in through long years, never either repented of nor absolved? . . .

When Vicky knew, would she judge her with the remorseless condemnation of youth? Perhaps when Vicky received the Faith she too would be arrayed against her. Could these children, so robbed, so denuded of their spiritual heritage, ever forgive her? . . .

CHAPTER XV

An Awkward Situation

1

MARTIN came daily to the house in Hill Street. Lady Pendre resolved to defer her own departure from London for as long as possible, so that the young people might see as much of each other as they could. It was for this reason, too, that she put off the evil moment of disclosure. Her husband's absence rendered this feasible, and she was further assisted by the fact that, owing to the heat, Barbara had already taken her little son to the seaside, and Pamela Webb had accompanied her.

Things weren't even now going to be easy, Martin reflected, though the present days were full of sweetness. They would have to cross stormy waters before he could call Vicky his own. Lord Pendre seemed to loom in the background—a stern, indomitable and hostile figure of destiny.

It was unlikely, however, that he would join his family in London before their return to Pendre, which was fixed provisionally for the middle of August. London was emptying fast, and he had once or twice written to ask the cause of the delay. From his letters Lady Pendre gathered that he had been seeing a good deal of Soames, who was now settled once more at Moth Hill Park.

It was the first time in all her married life that she had even acted in direct opposition to her husband's wishes, and the knowledge made her feel a little guilty. All these years she had been contented to remain a mere cipher where her children were concerned. Because she could not teach them the one thing which she ought to have taught them, she had refused to teach them anything at all.

But now she was deliberately encouraging her daughter in a marriage that Lord Pendre would detest for every conceivable reason. It made her afraid to see him again. When she saw him, she knew that she would not be able to withhold the truth from him. And he had a right to know it. Besides, their long association precluded such a withholding.

She did not know how he would receive such a confession from her lips. Harsh and violent as he had often shown himself to his younger children, he had been consistently kind to herself. Whatever his faults, he had loved her devotedly. He had been a faithful and adoring husband, and his love had meant a great deal to her. The thing for which she had bartered all had not proved, as is so often the case, worthless or delusive. It had its own solid and permanent value; it had helped her more than anything to drug her conscience, to forget . . . .

Now perhaps things would never be the same between them again. Perhaps he would even suspect her of a longing to look back—to return to the practices of her religion. And how could she ever return? . . .

They would be alone together in that great opulent house, with Vicky married and Eustace away. Sitting in that brooding shadow, estranged perhaps and alienated. And for the first time she thought of her own future with something of terror. For it might be, too, that if, as now seemed probable, Vicky and Eustace became Catholics, the knowledge of her apostasy might alienate and estrange them also.

Of Eustace, in the days that followed, they saw very little. He seemed to be immersed in some secret and absorbing business of his own which occupied all his thoughts and kept him a great deal from the house. Lady Pendre had never questioned him, and she did not do so now. She would have been glad to receive his confidence, although she never invited it.

Eustace himself was a little baffled at her evident desire for the marriage between Martin and Vicky to take place, even now that she was aware of the change in Sedgwick's religion, and realizing, as she must, how distasteful the idea would be to her husband.

"She wants Vicky to marry Martin not in spite of his being a Catholic, but because he is one," he told himself, when reflecting upon the happenings of that memorable Sunday.

He was delighted to think the engagement was an accomplished fact, and surely when it came to Soames' ears it would destroy any foolish hope he might still cherish. But his mother's attitude had surprised him. She had brought up her children quite deliberately without religious teaching, and now she was actually encouraging her daughter to marry a man who had recently chosen to belong to a Church that stood for dogma, lucidly and logically promulgated, and that was changeless and immutable as no other religious body had dared to remain. People had been crying out for a new religion since the War, but the Catholic Church had gone on steadily, unchangingly, gathering to herself thousands of new disciples all over the world. And it wasn't as if Lady Pendre had been ignorant of the claims of that Church. On the contrary, she was somehow quite accurately informed as to their nature. Eustace found himself as ever groping in obscurity, seeking for clues to the mystery that as ever baffled him.

They were a very happy little group of people, harmonious, united. Vicky seemed to have acquired a new sweetness. Martin was proudly possessive, and he seemed to have taken Lady Pendre and Eustace to his heart as well. He was rather a lonely person, as he had lost both his parents, while his only brother had been killed in the War. He had a married sister who was now in India with her husband and another living in the North; they seldom saw each other. Vicky's family, with the exception of Lord Pendre, seemed to Martin perfectly delightful. He wished that everything had been smooth, that there hadn't been those rocks and breakers ahead.

2

The storm burst sooner than anyone had imagined, for even Lady Pendre had complacently supposed it would await her return to the country. But one morning while she was breakfasting in bed—a luxury she could never enjoy at Pendre—a telegram arrived from her husband. *Shall come to-day for week-end with Soames.*

This laconic and sinister message fell like a bombshell, disintegrating everything. Her first thought was naturally for Vicky, who would be the principal sufferer. That Soames should come at the present moment was an outrage, but Lord Pendre, possibly forseeing that his arrival would not meet with her approval, had purposely given her no opportunity of canceling the arrangement. In a few hours they would be here. . . .

Probably it meant that the two men had come to an understanding, and that a renewal of pressure was to be brought to bear upon Vicky.

Lady Pendre was little accustomed to take action upon her initiative. But she had embarked upon a policy of deception, and already it was leading her into the proverbially thorny and tangled ways. She felt now that her daughter must be got out of the house with as little delay as possible. The question was one of destination. Useless to send her down to Cornwall to enjoy the salubrious Atlantic breezes with Barbara and Pamela. Mrs. Hammond was entirely in favor of the proposed marriage with Soames, and Pamela would not be best pleased to see Vicky appear upon the scene. Barbara had not cared for Soames herself, but in her opinion he was the "very man" for her sister. Not too soft, but capable of providing the firm hand of which poor Vicky was supposed to be in need. Aware of her elder daughter's attitude, Lady Pendre ruled her house out of court.

But something must be done at once. . . . Soames would surely not have accepted such an invitation unless he had been fairly convinced that his arrival would not be unwelcome to Vicky. He was perhaps coming with the idea that the engagement would be shortly announced. Lady Pendre felt no little indignation that her husband should not only be able to deceive himself so completely in the matter but that he should also have persuaded Soames to accept his point of view.

She dressed hurriedly and then sent a message to Vicky. Probably she was already getting ready to go out with Martin; he always fetched her in the morning.

"Why, Mummie, what on earth's the matter? Anything wrong?" Vicky came eagerly into the room. She embraced her mother. Then her eye fell upon the telegram lying on the table.

"Your father's coming up to-day with Ernest Soames."

"Oh, help!" said Vicky, flippantly.

But beneath her flippant manner she felt a new and terrible fear. Fear of being parted from Martin—of losing what she had only just won.

He was more dear to her now. The very fact of their engagement had taught her that. She gazed at her mother, wide-eyed. What would Lady Pendre do at this critical moment? Would she still openly espouse her cause, or would she stand by, mutely watching her defeat? . . .

"What are you going to do, Mummie?" she cried, dismayed.

"I'm going to send you away. The question is where to? Of course I see now I ought to have told your father at once about—your engagement. It was very wrong of me to hide such an important thing from him. But I did want you to have a little time of happiness together—you and Martin."

"Eustie might take me somewhere. I should love that!"

"I'm not sure that I could spare him, except for your journey."

"Then let me go and stay with dear old Briggy. You know she's often wanted me to, and Hove is so nice and near. Martin could come down and see me."

Since her retirement Miss Brigstocke had been living in a little house at Hove on a pension graciously accorded by Lord Pendre.

As there was little time to be lost, a telegram was sent with the reply prepaid. By luncheon-time all was settled; Miss Brigstocke was overjoyed, and to perfect the arrangement Martin was to escort Vicky thither. Eustace remained in London with his mother, to "face the music," as he expressed it.

"If we don't look out," he prophesied, "Vicky'll have a regular nervous break-down. She seems on the brink of it."

"Oh, I'm sure Miss Brigstocke will take every care of her. And the change'll do her good. I suppose Martin will stay in Brighton till Sunday evening?"

"That's the idea. Vicky's afraid of something happening to separate them. I think I shall give that blighter Soames a hint. I'm sure he doesn't realize that she's dead against it. Dad's probably persuaded him, by this time, that she's quite keen on him. I mean to show him he's wrong."

His mother's prompt and decisive action had surprised him fully as much as it had done Vicky. Never in his life could he remember that she had interfered between her husband and their children. While he was as grateful to her as Vicky was, he yet dreaded the consequences, and shrank from the thought of the inevitable meeting that could not now long be postponed.

Besides, his father was quite capable of going to Hove by an early train on the morrow to fetch Vicky back. He would never listen to the idea of her marrying Martin. Eustace felt troubled and miserable, believing that he would find it more than ever difficult to break free in the future. His mother would be so lonely without any of her children.

3

They were sitting waiting in the drawing-room that evening, when they heard through the open window the sudden sound of a motor-car slowing up and stopping in the street below. Eustace went to the window and, drawing aside the blind, looked out. It was not yet dark, but the evening gold was deepening to a purple-brown that enfolded everything in a warm and colorful twilight.

"They're both there," he said shortly.

He glanced at his mother, but she made no comment. Her face, pale as the white dress she was wearing, evinced no emotion.

Then Lord Pendre came into the room, immense, massive, formidable. There was a subtle courtesy in his manner that foreboded danger. It might be he had already guessed that even if he himself were welcome, his companion certainly would not be.

He was followed by Soames, in whose dried and reddened face Eustace thought to discern a bleak triumph.

When Lady Pendre met her husband's eyes—those black fierce eyes so destitute of lights and shadows—her heart sank. Her smile was a little forced as she greeted the two men. She was thankful then—yes, and grateful—for Eustace' support.

Her sense of guilt deepened; she felt uneasy, and it seemed to her that her husband was already aware of it, and was beginning to search for its cause.

Her action had created a wholly new and unaccustomed situation between them. How would he meet it? Would his anger for the first time get the better of his love? And would that anger be for the first time directed against herself? Would he simply trample on her wishes—fetch Vicky home—insist upon the marriage? No—that at least was impossible—he had Martin to reckon with now.

Soames was almost immediately taken up to his room, and then Lord Pendre turned sharply to his wife.

"Where's Vicky?"

"She's . . . . out."

"Why isn't she here? Didn't you tell her I was bringing Ernest?"

He saw that his wife was nervous and trembling; the knowledge irritated him. He had had a most cheery, pleasant journey with Soames, and had arrived fully prepared to spend an agreeable evening with his wife and family. Vicky was to be freely forgiven and taken back into favor.

But Vicky was not present; his wife was obviously nervous and sedulously avoided meeting his inquiring gaze; Eustace sat there, frowning, sullen and silent,—a death's head at the feast. The atmosphere was charged with hostility. He could only conclude that it was because he had brought Soames with him.

"Out? This evening?" he continued angrily. "Who's she out with?"

Lady Pendre offered no explanation.

"Is she with Barbara? But, no—Barbara's in Cornwall—"

"She's not with Barbara. . . ."

"Will she be back to dinner?"

"No . . . ."

Eustace looked up and said:

"Vicky's not in London. She preferred not to be here as you were bringing Soames with you. One can hardly blame her."

His voice was cool, with a flick of contempt in it. It roused his father's fury.

"Well, I'm not going to have anything of that sort! You'll have to tell me where she is, and I'll fetch her myself in the morning. I am not going to be made a fool of, nor is Soames!"

"Hugo—don't." Lady Pendre rose and went up to her husband. "We must make the best of it without her. One of us must explain to Mr. Soames. . . . There was no time to ask you not to bring him, and while he's here don't let's quarrel."

"If you think I'm going to let Vicky *flout* me—"

"No, but she utterly refuses to marry Ernest. You can't force her into it. You'd better leave her alone."

Her little speech was interrupted by Soames' reappearance. In a moment Lord Pendre was controlled and polite, the courteous host. They went down to dinner.

Soames was obviously ill-at-ease. He began to realize that Vicky's absence was intentional; it had been adroitly contrived to synchronize with his own arrival. Lady Pendre had most undoubtedly cried, *Check!* He had an uneasy feeling that her move might even prove to be checkmate, just at the moment when he had believed victory was his.

Always, he had summed her up as a beautiful automaton, with little mind or will of her own, to whom Lord Pendre was devoted and considerate and even tender. Men with an overpowering and tremendous personality often chose that type of wife, not exactly meek, but indolent and accommodating and thankful to surrender the management of house and home into cleverer and more competent hands. A calm, attentive, impartial spectator. . . . And lo, without warning she had cried *Check!*

Never having anticipated opposition from that quarter, he felt as uncomfortably astonished as if a beautiful statue had suddenly come to life and evinced a spontaneous hostility toward himself, barring his ingress to some desired haven. He had never attached any significance to Lady Pendre, nor feared anything from her; it was therefore dismaying to perceive suddenly that she was a force with whom it was necessary to reckon.

He began to feel that he had been deceived about Vicky's supposititious preference for himself, and sincerely wished that he had never left the security of Moth Hill. Pendre should have made more sure of his ground, before inducing him to accompany him.

No one seemed inclined to speak, and finally Soames, with a laudable recognition of his own duty as guest, endeavored to produce some conversation, at all costs.

"I suppose you've heard Miss Tresham has given up Glen Cottage?" he remarked. "She found she couldn't afford it. I shall do it up and modernize it before I look for another tenant."

He glanced at Eustace as he spoke. He had heard a strange rumor that he had been seen leaving Glen Cottage on the very evening of Mrs. Tresham's death. His bailiff had told him, assuring him that he couldn't have been mistaken—he'd seen young Mr. Wingrave as plain as daylight!

That Eustace should have visited her then, seemed to suggest an intimacy of some standing, and one of which his father was surely unaware.

But Eustace met his glance coolly.

"Where's she gone?" he asked.

"She's staying with Mrs. Dyrham for the present, but that's only a temporary arrangement, I believe."

Eustace thought: "Then I shall see her." Even his mother drove over occasionally to visit Mrs. Dyrham—no one could possibly object to his going there. At that moment he longed to be back at Pendre. London seemed unbearably close and stuffy. He wanted those deep shady woods with their flowers and tangled undergrowth, the wide meadows dipping down to that divine blue vision of the Irish Sea. . . .

He tried to picture the remote little cottage lying empty. He could see it so plainly in the blue and gold of a May evening, with the trees behind it breaking into emerald flame, and the deep sound of the sea rising and falling in the distance.

"I shouldn't mind living at the cottage myself," he told Soames now with a smile.

"A nice place to loaf in," remarked Lord Pendre, bitterly. He was thinking: "How long does the fellow mean to remain idle? He's been back over five months, and he's as fit as a fiddle. There's nothing the matter with him but sheer laziness. He's at the back of Vicky's rushing off like this, I'll be bound."

After dinner Soames made an excuse to go out. He would look in at a music-hall, he said, and, besides, he wanted to go to his club. To tell the truth he found the atmosphere threatening, and there seemed to be no chance of seeing Vicky. If it hadn't been for his mother, Eustace would have suggested accompanying him. He wanted an opportunity of speaking to him in private, and explaining Vicky's absence.

4

Lady Pendre had gone up to the drawing-room, and after Soames' departure the father and son retired to the smoking-room.

Eustace picked up some evening papers and glanced perfunctorily at their contents. There would be a scene of course. He could see that his father suspected him of having been an accessory to the little plot for hurrying Vicky out of sight so as to avoid any possible meeting with Soames.

Lord Pendre's face was very black; his eyebrows met in a broad dark line across his face, his eyes were fierce and somber. He had suddenly found himself confronted by a most unexpected situation, and he foresaw some difficulty in offering Soames a satisfactory explanation of it.

Soames had a temper of his own; he had no small sense of his own importance, and this action of Vicky's, obviously supported by her mother and brother, might have the effect of putting him off altogether.

Eustace put down the newspaper and took a cigarette-case from his pocket. But his father impatiently thrust a silver box in front of him, saying: "Here—have a decent cigarette! Don't smoke those filthy gold-flakes here."

Eustace replaced his own case and, taking a cigarette from the proffered box, lit it. He knew that his father's eyes were upon him, and that probably he would have to endure the chief brunt of his anger.

Lord Pendre watched him. Eustace' very composure irritated him. And as he looked at him he thought how little he knew of this young man who one day would perhaps inherit Pendre—if he behaved himself! And not only Pendre, but an elder son's portion of all that goodly wealth he himself had been storing up for so many long years by dint of unceasing industry and effort. What were the secret thoughts of his heart—his ambitions—his hopes? What did he demand of life—this man who possessed so much of his mother's reserve and reticence, and so little of her charm and docility? . . .

There was something in Eustace' cold critical look that always aroused his secret indignation. He had a dreadful suspicion at times that his son instead of envying him his great possessions pitied him on account of the things he had missed.

Well, he had done his best to mould him into a decent shape so that he might carry on the great work he himself had inaugurated, becoming perhaps in time a millionaire if he proved prudent and industrious. But Eustace was not malleable; he thought his own thoughts, went his own way.

Lord Pendre broke the silence at last with an angry:

"Do you know where Vicky is?"

"Yes, Dad."

"Where is she?"

Eustace flicked the ash from his cigarette, and then answered slowly:

"She's staying with Miss Brigstocke at Hove."

"Did you take her down there?"

"No."

"Who went with her, then?"

"Look here, Dad," said Eustace, "I'm sorry I can't tell you any more. You must ask mother. But Vicky isn't coming back as long as Soames is here."

"We'll see about that," said Lord Pendre, grimly. "I shall go and fetch her myself."

"You'd better not, Dad. Vicky's simply at breaking-point. You'll have her ill next."

"You mean she's hiding from Soames?"

"If you choose to call it that."

Lord Pendre seized a heavy book that was lying on the table and flung it with unerring aim at his son's head. Some form of physical violence was the natural expression of his rising wrath. Eustace made a sharp movement so the missile only grazed his cheek. He picked it up, replaced it on the table, and sat down again. His face was very pale except for the long narrow red smear where the book had struck him.

"She shall come back to-morrow if I have to go and fetch her myself! I won't have this rebellion. And you've been aiding and abetting her. What do you suppose Soames is thinking of us all?"

"It's time he learned the truth," answered Eustace, coolly.

Lord Pendre left the room abruptly. He was resolved to learn further particulars of this gross, unparalleled act of rebellion from his wife. Vicky was only laying up trouble for herself. . . .

Eustace waited for a moment and then followed him upstairs. He was afraid of him in this mood of undisciplined fury. Not that he had ever seen him offer violence to his wife, but then she had never before set herself in deliberate opposition to him.

The drawing-room door was shut when he reached it, and from the landing outside Eustace could hear his father's voice raised in shrill and angry monologue. Then came a little crash as of something falling, the splintering of glass and china, followed by a thud. In the sudden dead pause that ensued Eustace entered the room.

His mother was sitting on the sofa, outwardly calm but very pale. Her dark eyes were fixed upon her husband's face with a kind of weary almost desperate appeal. Lord Pendre was standing not far from her, and between them, on the carpet, lay a small broken table and a quantity of smashed china. In his wrath he had apparently hurled it over. The same frenzy that had prompted him to fling that great book at his son's head. . . .

He did not observe Eustace' entrance, but continued his furious monologue.

"You're to tell me at once! Do you hear, Giselda? What's all this mystery about? I know she's gone to Miss Brigstocke's, but who took her there? I won't have you making a fool of Soames like this! I'll fetch her myself in the morning, and we shall soon see who's master. She shall have a lesson she'll never forget. As if I didn't know what was best for her!"

"It's useless, Hugo. Vicky utterly refuses to marry Mr. Soames—she's more decided about that than she ever was. It was a mistake your bringing him here, and I rather wonder that he came. He must have known by this time his presence wasn't welcome to her."

"He came because I assured him that the engagement could be given out at once. Vicky's had lots of time to think it over and make up her mind. I've stretched a point in letting you stay on in London—you ought to have been back as usual for the Flower Show. People have been asking questions—wondering why it was hanging fire. I meant to give Vicky a good talking-to directly I arrived, and I felt sure that now she's had all these months in which to consider the matter she would prove perfectly reasonable. And now you've aided and abetted her in this useless rebellion—you and Eustace between you!" His dark eyes held an ugly light. "You've let her go away—insulting Soames—"

"Yes, I had to help her. We were afraid of what you might do. I've never gone against you before, Hugo, but you've driven me to it. I couldn't stand by and see my own child sacrificed to your insensate ambition and love of money!" There was a little passion in her voice, and her eyes shone with anger. "Vicky wanted my help. You can't force her into a loveless marriage—especially when she loves another man!"

She made a gesture as if to entreat Eustace, who was still standing there, to make himself visible to his father, whose back was turned to him. But he did not move.

"Another man?" he snapped. "What other man? She doesn't know any other men. I've taken good care that she shouldn't."

"If you think a little, Hugo, you'll know who it is!"

He turned upon her with renewed fury.

"You don't mean Sedgwick—that young ass, without a penny? I forbade him ever to write to her or come near her again. I should have thought after my last letter he wouldn't have dared show his sneaking face near my house!"

"Vicky is engaged to him, Hugo. They are to be married quite soon."

"They are not! He's after her money, and he'll never have a farthing of it. I can promise him that. Let's hear if they're still engaged when he knows that!"

"He's ready to marry her without a farthing from you. He cares for Vicky, not for her money. They've been devoted to each other ever since he stayed with us at Pendre. Hugo—do look at it reasonably. Vicky has the right, within certain limits of common prudence, to choose for herself. And we haven't any right to dictate to her—we can't force her to marry Soames. It would be a crime. . . ."

Eustace stood and listened as if he had been an unwilling actor in some dreadful little drama. He felt passionately sorry for his mother, yet he could not but admire her cool courage, her inflexible determination. She was paying now, however, for all those years when she had seemed to stand aside and never occupy herself with the concerns of her children, their moral or spiritual welfare. And it seemed to Eustace, as he listened, that she had just awakened to a sense of her own acute responsibility toward this young soul committed to her care. Indolent, and perhaps even a little timid by nature, she was now being forced into action, driven as it were by some fierce and mysterious power. . . .

"I shall go and fetch her home to-morrow! I refuse to allow this farce to go on any longer. You seem to forget that Vicky isn't of age. I shall soon teach her her duty! Sedgwick indeed! He's found a nice way of rewarding me for my hospitality to him when he was ill. I only wish I'd caught him making love to her—as I've no doubt he did—at Pendre!"

"Don't go to her, Hugo. Leave her alone—"

He made a menacing step toward his wife, and Eustace slipped forward and stood between them. His action had been so swift that it took his father completely by surprise.

For a moment the two men faced each other. Eustace was a much smaller and slighter man than his father; he looked a mere slip of a boy beside him.

"How long have you been there, eavesdropping? What have you heard?"

"Everything you've said since you knocked over the table."

Lord Pendre pushed his son aside with a violent gesture. His blood was up, and a torrent of abuse and invective poured from his lips. Elemental, primitive, despite the veneer which wealth and position had bestowed upon him, he had reverted to the language of the class from which his father had sprung. Only the great coarse strength gave him a kind of dignity.

Eustace had never in his life seen him so angry. But his anger had shifted now from his wife to his son. There was less danger in that.

"Eustace, do go away, dear," said Lady Pendre.

It seemed to her that she ought to suffer alone, that she had no right to drag her son into the appalling little scene. She rose and stood there very fearlessly, looking tall and slender and young in her white dress.

"I had to go against you for Vicky's sake, Hugo," she said. "It wasn't easy. But you've made me glad she wasn't here to-night—you've shown me I was right to send her away. And I'm not going to let my daughter be forced into a marriage—I couldn't let her taste that *misery!*" The emphasis she laid upon this word was slight but significant. "Especially when she is in love with another man."

Her speech, cold and stern, with a hint of rebuke in it, seemed strangely enough to calm him. Or had there been something in the actual words to bring him, albeit tardily, to his senses? Had she touched some memory to which he reacted involuntarily? Did he understand all that lay behind those emphatic words: "I couldn't let her taste that *misery* . . . ?"

Eustace had never before questioned her love for his father, but at that moment a dreadful little doubt came into his mind, fortified by Vicky's careless words, that recurred to him then.

"Vicky hasn't any religion to help her. She might not endure it," Lady Pendre added fearlessly.

Eustace slipped out of the room as noiselessly as he had entered it. He judged that there was no longer any need for him to remain. His father's rage had spent itself, and he felt that his mother was being driven by the exigencies of the situation to say things that it was more seemly he should not hear. After her long, long silence she was lifting the curtain a little. Her words had pierced him like a sword. Had she been so very unhappy in her married life? Had she suffered, this cold, enigmatic woman, when they had thought her merely indifferent? She had seemed so utterly without spiritual support in that wealthy, luxurious materialistic life of hers. But he felt that in her determination to save Vicky from this loveless marriage, she had had some experience of what it could entail of bitterness and suffering. . . .

But surely she had known compensation. It couldn't have been all suffering. She had had Philip—her love had been most truly his. What had life been like for her since that day when they had brought her the news of his gallant death, and she had uttered that terrible, sinister little speech: *"It was I who killed him . . . ?"*

These thoughts crowded tumultuously through his mind. He could hardly even now believe in the objective reality of what he had seen and heard. It was all part of some dreadful dream. . . .

Was Vicky right in her assumption that their mother had been forced into a loveless marriage for worldly motives? It was quite possible, he thought, that his father's iron will had dominated the weak and dissipated character of Major Kelsey. He might even have brought peculiar pressure to bear upon that miserable bankrupt. Yes, he was capable even of that, to gain a desired end. Eustace realized that his father could be almost unscrupulous, although never actually dishonorable, in the attainment of something upon which he had set his heart. A man so bent on success as he was, must surely blind himself to certain very delicate claims of honor. That he could so blind himself, was visible in his outrageous attempt to force this ambitious marriage upon his inexperienced little daughter. It might well be, therefore, that in the matter of his own marriage, when love and, it might be, also ambition were furiously concentrated upon one particular woman, he had made use of those qualities in his character which were inexorable, primitive, and undesirable.

Eustace tried to dispel these disloyal thoughts. It might be that Vicky's words had misled him. But to-night he had glimpsed that fierce, primitive elemental man, and he felt that he was looking at him from a fresh viewpoint.

And then it was quite possible that this very hypothesis might prove to be the true source of the shadow which of late had assumed such preposterous and malignant proportions in their home life.

He seemed to see his mother, eternally standing there with her white dress flowing about her, speaking in that quiet deadly voice, so passionate for all its calm. And his father, staring, staring, as if some deep and fathomless abyss had opened suddenly at his feet, dividing him from his wife.

That had been the worst part of it all. To see him change, as it were, in a moment and become silent, almost cowed, as if strength had gone out of him. . . .

Eustace waited on the landing above, listening for some sound from below. But there was none. And presently, after many minutes of complete silence, he heard his father emerge from the drawing-room and close the door softly behind him, almost as if he had left death in the room. Then the echo of his heavy feet going with measured tread down the stairs.

And then silence that, together with the shadow, filled the house from attic to cellar. . . .

4

Ernest Soames returned to the house in Hill Street a little before midnight. A sleepy-looking footman admitted him, and he was walking toward the stairs when Eustace intercepted him, appearing from a door to the right of the entrance. This room was seldom used by anyone but himself, it was furnished as a study with a great roll-top writing table and a large bookcase full of books.

Eustace was never tired of poring over those volumes when he was in London, for many of them had been bought in lots at auctions irrespective of their contents. And sometimes his searchings were rewarded by the discovery of a rare book or first edition, or perhaps a precious, little-known pamphlet. He always called his researches in the dull little room "digging for treasure."

But to-night, while he had sat there waiting for Soames, he had not opened a single volume. His thoughts had been fixed profoundly, tormentingly upon the recent scene in the drawing-room.

"I'd like to speak to you for a moment, please," Eustace said.

Soames was a trifle annoyed at the encounter. It was late—he had had a long journey and a disappointing day—he wished very naturally to go to bed. And young Wingrave, as he somewhat contemptuously called him in his thoughts, had evidently been waiting up on purpose to speak to him. What could the fellow want? Something to do with his sister, he supposed. Perhaps he had some explanation to offer in regard to the anomalous position in which Soames had discovered himself upon his arrival in London.

He was deeply mortified, and reluctant to hear anything from Eustace. It was his father who ought to have explained and apologized, too, for bringing him here at all. . . .

Nevertheless he turned, retraced his footsteps, and followed Eustace into the study. The window was open; the room was on a level with the street; they were disturbed frequently by the passing of pedestrians on the pavement just outside, or by the stir of belated traffic.

The air that came languidly in at the window was hot and enervating and filled with the composite odors of a great city. The opposite houses showed closed and shuttered windows that gazed like blind eyes upon the street. No stir of life in any of them. Probably the inhabitants had already fled to cooler regions of mountain or sea. . . .

The two men sat down at a table near the window so as to obtain as much air as possible. Eustace pushed a box of cigarettes toward Soames. They both smoked for a few minutes in silence.

"I'm afraid my father didn't understand exactly how matters stood here at present, or he would hardly have persuaded you to come," Eustace said, at length, wondering how he could best achieve the highly disagreeable task he had voluntarily undertaken.

Soames must have been deceived. No other explanation was possible. And it was only fair that he should know the truth.

Perhaps if he had not at one time declared his love for Barbara in perfervid terms, Eustace might have been able to feel more compassion for him now. But it was impossible, he felt, to show a great measure of pity for a man whose affections were able to shift with such rapid ease from one sister to the other. A man, too, who refused to accept a perfectly plain answer, but who went on battering at doors when he must have seen that they were emphatically closed against him.

"How matters stood?" he repeated. "How do they stand?"

His sharp eyes regarded Eustace with a quick penetrating glance.

"About Vicky. My father must have been buoying you up with false hopes all this time—assuring you that Vicky didn't know her own mind—although she'd told you quite plainly that she didn't mean to marry you."

"He said I wasn't to pay any attention to that—that Vicky never meant what she said. I trusted him to know and understand her better than I could possibly do."

Soames' face was rather ghastly, in the searching rays of a powerful unshaded electric lamp. It made him look older than his years, and the lines on his thin peaked face were brought into strong relief.

"Well, the unfortunate part of it is that he's never troubled to try and understand her," said Eustace. "He was awfully keen about the marriage, so he persuaded himself that she was keen too—was only holding back temporarily. I think he really believed it—he can make himself believe almost anything," he added, with the relentless criticism of youth.

As he proceeded, his task became easier. There was nothing like a plain unvarnished statement of fact to dispel misunderstandings. He wished he could have felt more sorry for Soames, but then he never even ought to have contemplated marrying a young fairy-child like Vicky. He should have foreseen that she could never reciprocate his love.

"There's something else you ought to hear, which'll certainly show you that Vicky does know her own mind," he continued. "But you mustn't blame my father for not telling you—he didn't know it himself until this evening. Vicky is engaged to be married."

"Engaged—without his knowledge or consent?" exclaimed

Ernest, in a surprised, deeply-mortified tone. "You can't be serious—you must be making an extraordinary mistake!"

Eustace' deep-set glowing eyes were fixed upon his face.

"I'm not making a mistake—I'm in Vicky's confidence, you see. She and I have always been pals. . . . It's perfectly true, but they know my father'll never give his consent, so they'll just get married without it. He's very angry, of course," Eustace added simply; "there was a scene after you'd gone out."

Soames, who throughout the interview had maintained a sullen and morose aspect, now looked like a man who had inadvertently disturbed a hornet's nest. So there had been a scene. Judging by Wingrave's face it must have been a stormy one.

"Whom is she going to marry?" he asked, nor yet fully convinced.

"Martin Sedgwick."

"Martin Sedgwick? That boy who was so badly wounded and who spent such ages at Pendre a year or two ago?"

"Yes."

"Then it can't be—it isn't—a new thing? . . ."

"No. It began then, although Vicky was such a child. Sedgwick's as fit as a fiddle now, and he's got a thundering good job at the War Office."

Soames' face was set in hard lines. But he bore his defeat well—so well that Eustace could not withhold from him a faint reluctant admiration. Soames knew when he was beaten, when in fact he had lost the hole upon which the game depended.

But Ernest's first anger was not directed against Vicky herself—she had always been perfectly frank and straightforward in her dealings with him; nor against Eustace, who had finally taken upon himself to tell him the exact and unpalatable truth; nor even against Martin, that young hero who had stepped in so lightly and secured the coveted prize. No, it was against his former friend, Lord Pendre, that his slow deep anger was rising.

"She could never have cared about me at all. She must have been thinking of Sedgwick all the time," he remarked bitterly. "She meant every word she said. She wasn't a child who didn't know her own mind, as your father suggested."

But whether Lord Pendre could ultimately be induced to give his consent to his daughter's marriage with Sedgwick, mattered not at all to Soames. It could make no difference to his own position, since Vicky had never cared in the least degree for him. He could remember young Sedgwick quite well—a very good-looking likable boy who had borne his physical sufferings with unusual fortitude. It was evidently a boy and girl affair that had ripened into something deeper and more serious as Vicky developed from child to woman. Yes, all this time she had cared very deeply for another man. He could picture them together—young, beautiful, attractive. And he felt that it would be difficult to keep them ultimately apart.

In that moment of quiet reflection Soames renounced all hope of winning Vicky. He could even have said with Oceanus:

> Have ye beheld the young God of the seas,
> My dispossessor? Have ye seen his face?
> I saw him on the calmed waters scud
> With such a glow of beauty in his eyes
> That it enforced me to bid sad farewell
> To all my empire . . .

Lord Pendre had utterly deceived himself upon the point, and, what was worse, he had drawn Soames into the tangled web of his own self-deception. He had duped him all along, by specious promises and assertions that had not the remotest foundation in fact. And he had brought him hither, ostensibly to carry the affair to a triumphant conclusion. The wound to Soames' pride was productive of the bitterest feelings toward his host, and he had the justice to exonerate Vicky from all blame in the matter. He deeply resented being placed in such an ambiguous and false position. Undignified, too, and humiliating. . . .

"I loved her—I wanted to marry her. I ought to have been warned of this other attachment. One naturally expects a father to know something of his own child's feelings."

"Well, Vicky and I have never been what you'd call intimate with him," said Eustace. "It was different with Barbara and Phip. He exhausted all his affection on those two—they could never do wrong, in his eyes. Vicky and I came on the scene a little too late."

Throughout his quiet speech there was a distinct strain of bitterness.

"And he knew nothing of this affair with young Sedgwick?"

"Well, he knew enough to put a stop to the correspondence between them more than a year ago. Directly he discovered it, in fact. And he made an awful row when he heard they'd met in the Pendre woods one day last spring. Martin just came down to say good-bye to Vicky before going abroad, but unfortunately my father spotted him at the station. The air went blue for miles!"

"I can't understand his motive for bringing me here today!"

"Oh, he probably thought he could arrange the whole thing—he's been accustomed nearly all his life to doing deals of one sort and another. He seems to have a kind of hypnotic effect upon the other side, judging by the result! You see, he thought it would be the best thing in the world for Vicky to marry you—and it would put her out of reach of an impecunious young man like Martin. You were a son-in-law after his own heart—he paid you that compliment!" Eustace' voice was dry and ironical. "He's always looked upon Vicky as a very troublesome, tiresome child who must simply be made to obey. We'll do him the justice to believe he wasn't for any reason anxious to get rid of her. But she wasn't pulling well with Pamela Webb, and that caused a certain amount of friction at home. Miss Webb likes living at Pendre, and of course my people are glad to have her there. I can't tell you any more than that. But I'm awfully sorry you were misled about it."

"So she was to be forced to marry me against her will?" said Soames, bitterly. "A nice position for us both!"

He, at any rate, had been guiltless of any share in the intrigue. He had only been a willing and rather foolish dupe. But he hadn't schemed to get Vicky against her will.

Realizing this, Eustace said in a more friendly tone:

"She's had a roughish time lately. I wonder it hasn't made her downright ill. Martin just came at the psychological moment."

"What'll they do? Marry without Lord Pendre's consent?"

"I suppose so. They've got enough—at least he has. And my mother approves."

"And Vicky's happy?"

He nodded. "Rather. Her wants are easily satisfied—she's never cared at all about money. And there's another thing, though my father doesn't know it yet. Martin's become a Catholic—he was received while he was in Malta. You know what my father thinks about Catholics in general, but for a man who's deliberately become one—put his head into the noose—he's got nothing but contempt."

"A Catholic?" repeated Ernest.

"I say, Soames, I'm really beastly sorry for you," said Eustace, holding out his hand with an impulsive gesture, "but I simply had to tell you—for your own sake. It didn't seem fair."

Soames took the proffered hand and grasped it cordially.

"You were quite right," he said, "the only pity is that you didn't tell me long ago. I shall push off home early to-morrow, and I'll leave a note for your father, telling him I've renounced all idea I ever had of marrying Vicky. I wish," he added, with a sudden burst of generous feeling that touched Eustace indescribably, "that I could feel this would make things a bit easier for her. But tell her from me that I hope she'll be very happy indeed. I remember young Sedgwick quite well—a charming boy—I'm sure he's worthy of her. She doesn't mind his being a Catholic, I suppose?"

"Not in the least. In fact, she rather likes it. I shouldn't be surprised if she became one herself."

"Really? Your father won't like that."

"I'll be sure to give her your message," continued Eustace. "It's been awfully good of you to take it like this, and to see that Vicky isn't really to blame. She always said, though, that you were a sport!"

Soames' smile was a little dry, yet Eustace could see that he was rather pleased than otherwise to have had this flattering term applied to him. "Old sport" it had probably been, but Eustace had spared him the unpleasing adjective.

"Well, I suppose it's time to turn in," remarked Eustace, rising. "And you'll make it quite clear to my father, won't you, that you consider the whole thing's off?"

"Yes—if he doesn't believe it you can tell him all I've said. I'm most awfully sorry, too, to think Vicky's been so worried about it. Poor child!" and he sighed.

"And Soames—" Eustace hesitated.

"Yes?" He wondered what more there was to come.

"About Miss Tresham. . . ."

"What about Miss Tresham?"

"She's all right, I suppose, with Mrs. Dyrham? Happy and all that?"

There was a restrained eagerness in his manner that did not escape Soames.

"I've only seen her once or twice since she went there—she looked a little pulled down. I fancy she misses her mother. Mrs. Dyrham talks of taking her abroad in the winter, perhaps to Rome. I daresay the change of scene would do her good."

"If you should see her again, please remember me to her."

"I certainly will."

"Good-night, Soames."

"Good-night, Wingrave."

CHAPTER XVI

Flight

1

SUNDAY morning duly witnessed the hurried and almost surreptitious departure of Ernest Soames from Hill Street. He took care to time his exit before there was any chance of meeting either Lord Pendre or his wife.

Eustace' revelations had completely opened his eyes, and he was bound to acknowledge that his friendship for Lord Pendre had received a severe blow. No doubt they would still in the future play golf together, and even meet amicably upon the Bench, but the old intimacy was surely gone forever.

He had admired him, his success, his industry, his capacity for organization, the untiring ardor of a man who permits nothing to hinder his quest for wealth, and it had been something of a shock to discover that he was capable of trying to force his young daughter into a marriage that was entirely distasteful to her, knowing all the time, too, that she cared very much for another man. It was true, then—this legendary harshness, this reiterated story of the fierce autocratic temper, with which gossip had so plentifully endowed him. Soames in his blindness had always refused to believe it. He had on the contrary been struck with Lord Pendre's avowed solicitude for Vicky's happiness, his determined efforts to promote it. Now these pleasing illusions were all destroyed, and Ernest blamed the man bitterly for having made him look a fool.

He left a brief note for his host, regretting his summary departure, which he felt to be inevitable after Eustace' disclosures, and categorically relinquishing all hope or intention of marrying Vicky.

He felt that, on the whole, his exit was sufficiently dignified. His note had not been lacking in a veiled reproof; so much he considered Lord Pendre deserved.

Lord Pendre received the letter with his early cup of tea. He read it, crushed it up in his hand and flung it across the room. It seemed to put a touch of finality to his wife's efforts on behalf of Vicky. But, in a manner, he was thankful that Eustace had explained the position to Soames. It would save him from undertaking that disagreeable and graceless task himself. Whether he had been consciously deceiving himself all the time, it would have been difficult to say; but in imposing his own point of view upon Soames, he had been strongly actuated by the conviction that he could in the end dominate Vicky. . . .

It had been an exceedingly unpleasant surprise to arrive in London only to find Vicky fled, and his wife and son strongly and openly arrayed against him in the matter. He had therefore awakened that morning to the knowledge that he would certainly have to divulge the whole truth to Soames, who was a man of hot temper and might quite justifiably indulge in recriminations. Mercifully Eustace had already relieved him of the task; he had interposed fearlessly, and it was something of a relief to think that Soames had taken himself off without attempting to see him again or have an explanatory interview.

Still, there remained the task of setting his own house in order—not an easy one, judging by his wife's mood last night. It spelt danger, and there was always one point upon which she could injure him, destroying with light flick the very fabric of their happiness.

Scruples were stirring within her. They always heralded danger. Except for that momentary outburst at the time of Phip's death, he had been troubled by few fears of the kind during their married life. But the danger was always there, although it was kept sedulously in the background. The danger that her conscience might awaken from its long coma and reassert its old sway over her. And last night he had even felt that the dreadful moment might be near at hand.

This fear had forced him into silence. For, after all, it was Giselda who could deal the final and devastating blow.

The one deep and absorbing passion of the man's life was his love for his beautiful wife. Love that always breeds fear had given rise to a peculiar and unusual fear in his heart. But he had kept her rigidly apart from the things that might conceivably arise to separate them. He was indeed as jealously afraid of those former influences as in other circumstances he might have been of some quondam lover. For one never knew when an early formative influence might arise and resume its ancient primitive sway, perhaps with a new force and a fiercer energy after those years of desuetude. Demanding love instead of neglect, obedience instead of rebellion, insisting too, upon sacrifice and the renunciation of all those things that imperilled the immortal soul. . . .

Oh, he had always felt that one day he and his wife would inevitably stand at the crossroads, and that he would be called upon to engage in that final and perhaps decisive conflict with his ancient enemy for the possession of the woman he so loved. And who could tell whether he would emerge from that conflict victor or vanquished? . . .

When he went down to breakfast, he found himself alone in the dining room. Eustace had not appeared, and his wife had sent a message to say she was too tired, after a sleepless night, to get up.

He decided to postpone his journey to Hove till the next day. Traveling in the crowded Sunday trains, filled with August holiday-makers, did not appeal to his fastidious notions of comfort. And it would do no harm to leave Vicky there for one more day. She would have plenty of leisure in which to repent her rash rebellious action when she was safely back at Pendre. There would be no more talk of Martin Sedgwick then.

2

Eustace came into the room.

"Good-morning, Dad. You've had Soames' note, I suppose?"

"What's this you've been telling him about Vicky?" demanded his father, frowning.

"I told him the truth—that Vicky had no intention of marrying him—that she was engaged to Martin. It was about time someone told him, don't you think? Poor old Soames has been living in a kind of fool's paradise all these weeks."

His cool satirical tone acted like an irritant upon Lord Pendre's nerves. He did not bear defeat well; a hint of opposition roused his worst passions. And he felt that Eustace had contributed to that defeat by the strong support he had bestowed upon his sister.

"Look here," he said, "I won't have any more talk about this young Sedgwick. I'm not going to let Vicky marry a pauper. She shall just come back to Pendre and behave herself. I shall fetch her to-morrow."

He wanted to make it quite clear that Ernest Soames' exit from the stage would in no way facilitate Vicky's engagement to Martin. He was still master in his own house, thank God; he would put a stop to anything of that kind!

"And I should like to know how long you intend to idle about in this way, encouraging your sister in all kinds of folly?" he pursued.

"I'm willing to work," said Eustace, evasively. "I'd rather, though, it wasn't at Wingrave's."

"And why not at Wingrave's?"

"Because I prefer a free outdoor life. Somehow I don't believe I could stick being shut up in an office, just to make money."

"You'll never make any money unless you do."

Eustace was silent.

"And a nice farmer you'd make—mooning about!"

"I could learn."

"Soon I shall only be able to offer you an ordinary clerk's billet. I can't keep this job that was waiting for Phip open forever. And Gerard Hammond's younger brother is awfully keen about having it. He's very clever, took a good degree at Oxford; he's got any amount of energy and tenacity."

"Then you'd better give it to him. It'll please Barbara," Eustace said wearily. "Don't consider me, Dad. Give me a younger son's portion—I've never wanted anything that ought to have been Phip's."

"What is it that you do want, then? Let's hear!" sneered his father.

Eustace wondered ironically what he would have said and thought if he could have received a perfectly frank, unreserved answer to that question. Many sons, more happily placed than himself, would have given it so eagerly, sure of sympathetic comprehension.

Supposing he had answered simply: "I want to be a Catholic and marry Nella Tresham," what an explosion of wrath and scorn would have descended upon him! He was sick of these perpetual scenes, and was aware that as long as he remained at home, apparently idle and purposeless, they were bound to continue.

To be a Catholic, to marry Nella. To live somewhere quite simply and obscurely but very happily. And then perhaps in the years to come to inherit Pendre and light the Lamp that had been for so long extinguished. A chapel at Pendre. The Holy Sacrifice once more offered there daily for the living and the dead. . . .

Lord Pendre glanced irritably at his son. When he was in this obstinately taciturn and reticent mood one could never get anything out of him. No doubt he was hatching some plot in his head, with the intention of springing further disagreeable surprises upon his parents. A secretive fellow—probably up to no good. Lord Pendre felt that he received no consolation from any of his children except Barbara. They were all tacitly arrayed against him, with rebellion smouldering in their hearts. But if he could not exact love from them, he could at any rate insist upon obedience and submission. Vicky wouldn't have an easy time when she got back to Pendre.

The thought of Vicky made him say with sudden sharpness:

"If you see Sedgwick, you can jolly well tell him not to show his face here. He'll get something he won't like if he does. Vicky isn't of age, and he'll have a letter from my lawyers forbidding him to molest her."

"You needn't be afraid. He isn't likely to come."

"I don't trust any of you."

Lord Pendre went out of the room. He did not like to disturb his wife after her bad night, and he was feeling at rather a loose end. The airless heat of an August day in London seemed to him abominably enervating after the cool sea and mountain air of Pendre. He wished he had never come up to town on this wild-goose chase. It was the first time that any carefully laid and contrived plan of his had met with unsuccess, and the thought was a highly distasteful one to him. His defeat had also been complicated by things that had still further embittered it. He must have forfeited at least something of the good opinion of Soames, who would no longer accredit him with such sober and wise judgment and accurate vision. He might justifiably regard him as a man who knew nothing of what was passing in his own house nor in the minds of his children. And what was worse than the loss of prestige in the eyes of his most influential neighbor, Lord Pendre had evoked a glimpse, momentary but highly significant, of his wife's stirring conscience. That was something which might have far-reaching and very disastrous consequences. It made him feel that he was growing old, and that his hand had lost something of its ancient cunning.

Presently Eustace heard him leave the house, banging the front door after him. Probably he had gone to his club, to enjoy a little peace and freedom from domestic worry.

3

Eustace went to the Oratory, choosing that church because he hoped to find Martin there, and to hear from him how Vicky had fared on her journey to Hove. He was already aware that Martin had not been able, owing to an important engagement, to remain in Hove for the week-end as they had originally hoped, but was to have returned to town on the preceding evening.

As Eustace was leaving the church after Mass, he saw Martin's fair head lifted a little above the crowd. He was making his way slowly toward the big middle door. His face brightened when he perceived Eustace waiting for him on the steps outside.

"Tell me what's happened," he said, as they turned into the Brompton Road.

"Oh, there's been an awful shine! But I told old Soames the truth, and he went off to Moth Hill early this morning. Pushed off before any one was up. I fancy there'll be a coolness between him and Dad for a bit. Still, it's 'something accomplished, something done,'" he quoted, ironically.

"It is indeed," replied Martin, with an air of relief.

"Tell me about Vicky."

"Oh, I took her down to Miss Brigstocke's—the old lady was frightfully pleased to see her again. Purred over her like anything! I think it'll do her good—the change and complete rest. I thought of running down again to-morrow to have a look at her if I can get off."

"I shouldn't advise it. The governor's going down to-morrow to fetch her back, and she's to be marched off to Pendre."

"Can't your mother do anything to prevent it?"

Eustace shook his head. "She's done all she can—I've never known her to do half so much for any of us before. She showed him her hand—that she meant to back Vicky. But there's one thing, Martin—old Soames won't give us any more trouble—he's frightfully sick with Dad about the whole show. Thinks he's been deceived and duped and all the rest of it. He was quite decent about Vicky."

"It'll be awful for her at Pendre now."

"Yes. But we must manage something."

"I wish I could marry her to-morrow."

"I wish you could, old thing. But Dad told me to warn you not to show your face anywhere about or you'd get a letter from his lawyer! And he doesn't know the worst about you yet!"

"The worst?"

"That you're a Catholic. . . ."

"I'm so glad Lady Pendre doesn't mind my being one," said Martin, "and she knows just what it entails too. I believe she could have taught Vicky more about the Church than she cares to admit. She must have had a good deal to do with it at some time or other. Do you think she was ever under instruction?"

"I shouldn't think so, unless it was before her marriage, but she never speaks of that time. We only know that she lived abroad a good deal with her father, and it's quite possible she may have come into contact with the Church then. Her father died soon after her marriage, and somehow I don't think her life with him could have been very happy. He gambled—he'd run through practically all their money. They were awfully hard up and living in Rome when Dad met them."

"In Rome!" echoed Martin. "Well, she could hardly live there for any length of time without learning a little about the Church."

"I suppose not," agreed Eustace.

Yet, what had it held for her—that old roving life, with its perpetual wandering from hotel to hotel, from pension to pension, from one dingy lodging to another? She, a young girl and so lovely, with for sole companion her old, ill, rather disreputable father? Surely it must have been for her a kind of prolonged martyrdom. And when Hugo Wingrave appeared on the scene, eager, wealthy, desperately in love, though past his first youth, must he not have appeared to her in the light of a rescuer to whom she owed at least all her gratitude, if not all her love? When Eustace thought of her thus, he could assure himself that her life, since her marriage, couldn't have been altogether unhappy; it must have held immense compensations, such as perhaps few women, even the very happy ones, possessed.

But the more he considered the matter in the illumination of recent events, the more profoundly was he convinced that her married life had held for her some subtle form of spiritual suffering. There was something—some shadow—that darkened that life, separating his parents spiritually. It was the enemy of peace if not of actual happiness. He could only dimly judge of its nature by the way they both reacted to its invisible influence. And now he had become convinced that whatever it was, it was most deeply and intimately associated with the mysterious and baleful shadow that hung over Pendre, and that indeed seemed to follow them wherever they went. The shadow that Vicky had in her childish imaginings attributed to a manifestation of Divine displeasure toward some sin secretly committed.

Last night Eustace had felt swamped and engulfed in its darkness, while he groped blindly for the clues that forever eluded him. When he had gone out of the drawing-room, unable to remain any longer, afraid indeed of what he might hear if he stayed, there had been something in his mother's face that had terrified him. And through it all he was conscious that paradoxically she loved his father, and was afraid of this thing that had the awful power to intervene and separate them. And he knew then that, whatever it was, the sin—if sin there had been—was hers. It was her doing. The shadow was upon her. He seemed to see her drowning in its darkness. There was terror in the thought . . . .

To him she was a saint, far removed from sin or error. He longed to stretch out his hands, and rescue her from that drowning darkness.

They walked almost in silence across the Park. The grass was burnt brown, there was not a blade of green visible. Some of the leaves were already falling from the plane trees—big, parched, shriveled star-shaped things, brittle to the touch as charred paper.

Martin's thoughts were full of Vicky, Eustace' of his mother. They parted at Stanhope Gate, Martin making some excuse for not accompanying him further.

"If I do go down to Hove to-morrow I'll dodge your father," said Martin. "I feel I must see her again before she goes back to Pendre, and make some plan for the future."

"Don't let anything come between you, Martin," urged Eustace.

Martin looked down upon him with his bright blue eyes.

"As if I should—as if I could! Don't you see this is a matter of life and death to me? We shall simply go off and be married if I can't get her in any other way. I don't know what the Church would say about that—I must ask. When one's a Catholic one's always up against it." He grinned delightfully.

"Surely they'd let you, if my mother gives her consent?"

"I should think so—but Vicky'll have to make all those promises."

"Oh, Martin—she'll be a Catholic herself soon, I'm certain of it! She and I have often wanted a religion—we've never had any."

"And you?"

"Oh, I've been on the road for ages!" His smile was very bright.

"I'm glad of that. I shouldn't like you and Vicky to feel separated."

They parted, and Martin strode off in the direction of Knightsbridge, while Eustace returned full of thought to Hill Street.

3

Miss Brigstocke lived in a modest villa in the western purlieus of Hove. The tiny modern red-brick house stood a little away from the sea and possessed a small strip of garden, back and front, wherein nothing much seemed to thrive except the inevitable neat hedges of euonymus and a few unhealthy-looking marigolds. Most self-respecting plants declined altogether to flourish there, tormented as they were by the bleak, bracing winds that visit Brighton and its environs at all seasons of the year.

She was a woman of frugal habit and few wants. When once she had recovered from her abrupt and unjust dismissal, she had come to enjoy her freedom and solitude. Lord Pendre had bought the freehold of her little house, and she was to retain possession of it for life. He also gave her a pension to supplement her own tiny income. But the scheme was less generous than it appeared at first glance, for land was steadily rising in value in that part of Hove, and he had made a calculation that by the time Miss Brigstocke died the sum he would be able to obtain for the property would cover the whole outlay of house and pension, and give him, besides, an adequate interest on the capital. This aspect of the matter had naturally never occurred to Miss Brigstocke, who accepted the provision in a spirit of warmest gratitude.

Martin brought Vicky down, but was only able to stop and have a cup of tea with them, as an unexpected engagement recalled him to London. It was a disappointment to them both that he could not remain in Hove for the week-end as he had originally intended to do. Miss Brigstocke was delighted to see him again and to hear of the engagement. It was only after he had gone that she learned from Vicky the true state of affairs, and she was dismayed to find that her presence there was still unknown to her father.

Vicky's visit during the first twenty-four hours of her stay, gave Miss Brigstocke the most unqualified pleasure, except indeed when she stopped to consider what Lord Pendre might have to say about it when it came to his ears. She had a great deal to hear, but what amazed her chiefly in the girl's recital was her father's extraordinary pertinacity in regard to Soames. He was far too old, and not in her opinion at all the right person for dear Vicky. She had been at Pendre during his brief and unsuccessful courtship of Barbara, but that, however, had never seemed so inherently unsuitable.

Miss Brigstocke had trained herself to think well of people, and, where it was possible, to like them. She had almost always succeeded in these dual difficult aims, and she had even succeeded where her late employer was concerned, cherishing a secret admiration for his formidable and somewhat forbidding personality. His iron will and enormous physical strength had made him attractive in her eyes until the day when she first beheld them wielded against Vicky, and then her loyalty was strained to breaking-point. Although not silent she had believed him strong, and his tenacity, his harsh autocratic temper, his limitless success and apparently limitless wealth, had combined to make his personality the most significant and arresting one she had ever encountered. Such a man, she felt, could be forgiven much; and to find that she was unable to forgive him on that occasion, showed her the extent to which he had fallen in her regard.

When she had first gone to Pendre she had believed that people so situated must surely be the happiest in the world. Hugo Wingrave—as he was then—with his beautiful wife and four handsome attractive children—seemed to her one of the most favored of men. And yet there was a flaw in the happiness of this richly endowed couple. There was something. . . . It wasn't all the fault of his fierce ungovernable temper, which both his younger children were, alas, so prone to rouse. It was something deeper than that. But Miss Brigstocke belonged to the Victorian era, she was more sentimental than imaginative, and thus she had lived in the darkness of the Shadow for ten years without realizing it.

Still, she had known that something was amiss. It wasn't only Lord Pendre's inexplicably harsh attitude toward Vicky, although in any other man she would have deemed it a serious fault of character. At first she had almost believed that Vicky's disposition was not good, that she had some childish tendency to err that required a special discipline, a meticulous correction. But as she became more closely and intimately acquainted with the child, she could discover no such tendency. She was highly-strung, nervous, imaginative, swift to respond to affection. It was the treatment she received that had rendered her at once timid and rebellious. Fear drove her to unheard-of extremes of reckless audacity. Miss Brigstocke, despite her admiration for Lord Pendre, soon betrayed a desperate inclination to hide Vicky from his sight whenever she heard him approaching. And when Barbara ranged herself so strongly, so openly, on her father's side, she began to find it very hard indeed either to like her or to think well of her.

She had her heresies, though, being prudent, she kept them to herself. People in her dependent position had to be as wise as serpents, she was fond of saying. But privately she held the opinion, even then at the moment of her engagement, that Pamela wasn't good enough for Philip Wingrave. He was of all the Wingraves the most attractive. His beautiful sunny disposition harmonized with his perfect face and physique. And Miss Brigstocke formed the opinion that Pamela was coldly ambitious. Even then Vicky and Pamela had been oddly antagonistic. After Philip's death Pamela's influence at Pendre had quietly deepened. She slipped into the place of elder daughter, left vacant by Barbara's marriage to Gerard Hammond.

Miss Brigstocke had strongly though secretly championed her little pupil. She cherished and comforted her. She won her confidence. She loved her, discerning so much that was beautiful in the child's mind, so much, alas, that was warped and frustrated by mismanagement in her by no means easy character. It had been a grief to them both when the hour of separation sounded, so suddenly, so inexorably. Miss Brigstocke was a sentinel who had fallen asleep at her post. She could expect no quarter any more than could a luckless sentinel.

What she did not know was that Pamela had previously warned Lord Pendre that Miss Brigstocke had acquired too great an influence over Vicky—declaring that without her support she was certain the girl would prove more amenable. She hinted, too, that Miss Brigstocke must have known of that unsuspected love-affair between Martin and Vicky. . . .

Lord Pendre had therefore only required a definite immediate excuse for getting rid of Miss Brigstocke. Besides, Vicky was too old now to need her any more. She had already almost ceased to do lessons, for which she had never at any time shown either aptitude or liking. . . .

The sorrow of leaving her pupil had, however, been in some measure compensated for by the independence she now enjoyed. Still, Miss Brigstocke felt that some peculiar crisis, some pressing emergency, must have arisen to prompt them to send Vicky down to her at such short notice. She was a little dismayed when she discovered that it had all been accomplished without Lord Pendre's knowledge or consent. It seemed to jeopardize her own position. But she was too generous to permit these sordid considerations to diminish her present pleasure, or militate against the warm welcome she had prepared for Vicky.

There was a great deal to hear, and she enjoyed the recital. Her own life was so retired, so eventless, that the little romance had a kind of vicarious charm for her. She liked to think there was still a world where dramatic things happened, where there were young people who loved each other and experienced the same thrills and hopes and fears she had known in her own youth. Vicky became important in her eyes. She had developed extraordinarily in the last few months. She had acquired a certain decision of character. Her prettiness, never of a conventonal type, was now almost striking. She still wore her glossy dark hair brushed off her brow in the old way; it was "shingled" now, and displayed the perfect shape of her small head, giving it an almost boyish aspect.

Vicky was obviously determined to marry Martin, and to marry him too as soon as possible. But when Miss Brigstocke thought of Lord Pendre, her heart sank a little. She knew just how hard and harsh and tyrannical he could be. He was a kind of super-man, arrogant, determined, almost unscrupulous in his fierce tenacity of purpose. Those qualities made for temporal success, but not for domestic peace. He was immensely strong, and to achieve a desired end he did not hesitate to use that strength. He would do all he could to separate Vicky and Martin. Whether he would succeed in forcing her to marry Ernest Soames was another matter. But Miss Brigstocke had seen him make Vicky do many things that were highly repugnant to her, and she was not prepared to pontify on the matter.

"Martin's become a Catholic," said Vicky. "He told me he'd been thinking about it for a long time. And he was received while he was in Malta."

"You'll never be allowed to marry him, in that case," said

Miss Brigstocke, who could perceive the essential hopelessness of the situation without this added obstacle.

"Oh, we mean to take the law into our own hands," replied Vicky. "Having Mummie on our side makes it all the easier. And she doesn't mind his being a Catholic. Why, she even gave him the impression that she must have had leanings, as he called it, at some time or other!"

The girl's silver laugh rang out merrily; it had a glad young sound.

"Oh, I think he must have been mistaken there," said Miss Brigstocke; "Lady Pendre always seemed to me very perfect—almost a saint—but perhaps without any fixed belief in the matter of religion."

"I don't know," said Vicky, thoughtfully; "we've wondered about that sometimes, Eustie and I. . . . I thought she didn't seem to object in the least to the idea of my becoming a Catholic too when I marry Martin. He'd like it, of course, and Mummie said I'd better be instructed, in any case. One needn't go any further if one feels it wouldn't be possible," she added.

Miss Brigstocke was a stout Churchwoman, and she had never lived in Catholic houses nor come much into contact with Catholics. She was therefore a little sorry to learn that Martin had become one; it wasn't quite what she would have expected of him. She was astonished, too, that Vicky should be so complacently ready to follow his example. Such marriage would be more than ever distasteful to Lord Pendre, with his very crystallized views on the subject—one didn't often meet with such fierce intolerance in these days.

"Eustace won't like that, will he?" she asked.

"Oh, I think he's half way to Rome himself. He was so awfully upset when Ernest Soames told us that the ballroom at Pendre used to be the chapel and that the Lamp had burned there for five centuries. We've always thought—and lately more than ever—that there's something queer and uncanny about Pendre. Sinister—like a deep shadow brooding over it. I felt it pretty badly last spring, before we left for London. It made me thankful to get away. Eustie felt it, too. I told him that it made me feel as if one of us had offended God. But what could any of us have done? We may have bad tempers and rows, but those aren't exactly crimes. What *could* any of us have done, dear Briggy?"

She turned her big dark innocent eyes to the elder woman's face, with a glance almost of appeal.

"Oh, my dear—you mustn't have such morbid thoughts! I'm surprised that Eustace should have encouraged you. You're all living good straight lives. Your father may be harsh, but he's honorable and upright. And your mother is a saint."

Vicky snuggled a little closer to her.

"Perhaps it's the atmosphere of an old Catholic house. I've felt at times as if the very stones at Pendre must regard us as rather godless usurpers and interlopers! And yet I'm pretty sure it can't be only that. It's something much more personal, that concerns ourselves. Something—oh, I can't put it any differently—that one of us must have done to offend deliberately!"

Miss Brigstocke was much more uncomfortably impressed by these disclosures than she would have liked to reveal. And her abounding common sense could suggest no words with which to combat or refute them. For had not she also been aware of Something at Pendre—something of so intangible a nature that she had never even thought of giving its expression in concrete terms? Vicky's mind had always been morbidly alert to receive impressions, and it had been to counteract a tendency to introspection that Miss Brigstocke had always given her plenty of sheer hard study of bare plain facts such as dates, historical events, geographical details, and things that were capable of scientific demonstration. She was aware of the tortuous paths through which a highly active imagination can lead its unfortunate possessor, and the strange, often sinister conclusions to which it can conduct a young, eager, and sensitive mind.

"And, you see, Eustie felt it, too. It wasn't only myself," continued Vicky. "I hoped that he'd laugh at me, and perhaps call it one of my queer notions. But he didn't—he'd had the same feeling. And it grew worse last spring. Briggy dear, what can it be?"

Miss Brigstocke had no explanation to offer. It was something of a shock to her—as it had been to Vicky—to find that Eustace shared these impressions, and had had no word of light mockery or reproof with which to silence his sister's fears.

Eustace wasn't fanciful. He saw things as they were, in all their hard, naked truth.

"We were walking on Moth Hill the first time we spoke of it," pursued Vicky. "And we just clung together for comfort, like two frightened children. And that isn't all, Briggy—"

"Tell me," said Miss Brigstocke.

She was not a coward, but anything that remotely suggested the supernatural did alarm her. She would have faced a thief or a burglar with far greater courage than she would have displayed to a ghost.

"I said something about it to Mummie—and she looked perfectly awful—so queer and startled. But she was very silent too, she didn't say anything—only I could see by her face that she knew of it—knew perhaps what it was and why it was there. I never dared mention it again to her."

"Vicky—I mustn't scold you now—but, my darling child, don't let your mind dwell on such things. You ought to fill it only with happy, wholesome, *good* thoughts! You ought to spend more time out of doors, among the flowers, in the sunshine and the wind. And you ought to pray—"

"I shall pray when I'm a Catholic," said Vicky firmly. "Martin says that being one is a great help—that the Church may be hard in some of the laws she lays down, but she gives us every help to keep them—she makes us *want* to obey—to please Our Lord."

Her little face kindled. Martin had talked to her a great deal about it, and something in his eager enthusiasm had fired her imagination. "I expect I shall find life a much easier thing when I'm Catholic I shall understand just what God wants me to do. Everything is so confused and muddled now. I felt that more than ever when Dad said it was my duty to marry a man I didn't love, just because he wished it. That made me know he couldn't be my standard of right and wrong any more. And Martin said it would be a sin for me to marry Ernest Soames when I didn't love him, but loved another man. It was a worse sin to marry Ernest than to disobey Dad!"

"I hope you won't take any steps about becoming a Catholic, without very great consideration," said Miss Brigstocke, earnestly. "It's such a very serious thing, and one that'll make any reconciliation with your father quite out of the question. I don't suppose Captain Sedgwick—"

"He's a major now," interpolated Vicky—"doesn't that make him seem elderly?"

"I was going to say that I don't suppose Major Sedgwick has a great deal of money . . . ."

"Oh, we both hate money," said Vicky; "we mean to live in quite a small house or perhaps a couple of rooms."

"But setting aside that question, I can't believe that your mother would approve of—of this change for you."

"Well, she's as nearly sympathetic about it as I've ever known her about anything," replied Vicky. "It's been wonderful, the way she's helped me all along. She couldn't bear the idea of my marrying Ernest, either."

"Someone ought to tell Mr. Soames exactly what you feel about it, and then I'm sure he'd give up the idea. He seemed to me a very sensible man."

"I did tell him as plainly as I could, but he wasn't allowed to believe me. Dad just made out I was a child who didn't know her own mind. But, Briggy, I could only think how perfectly awful it would be if Martin came back from Malta, as he promised faithfully he would, in order to marry me, only to find that I was already Mrs. Soames of Moth Hill Park. Oh, it would have meant I should never see him again! I couldn't face that, or the horrible thought that it would be a sin to go on loving him, thinking of him, as I did, any more."

"My dear Vicky," murmured Miss Brigstocke, almost shocked at this plain speaking.

"You know I've always had to think things out to their logical conclusion as far as I could see them. And that seemed to be the bitter end of my marrying Ernest. It showed me just how much I loved Martin, and in spite of all the efforts that were being made to separate us, I was certain that no one else could ever be my husband. And now that I'm engaged to him—we've been engaged three weeks already —I thinks he's a thousand times dearer and nicer than he ever was before. My heart seemed to stop beating when I saw him coming into the room with Eustie that Sunday—it was like a lovely dream. . . ."

She leaned her elbow on the window sill, resting her cheek upon her hand. Outside, the little garden was full of the blue dusk of a summer twilight, and they could see white moths flitting ghost-like among the dark thick-set hedges of euonymus. In the distance, too, they could hear the sustained rhythmic accompaniment of the sea beating on the hard shingly beach, with a clear calling sound.

"I can hear the sea—it reminds me of Pendre. I always miss it so in London."

They talked till quite late that night. Miss Brigstocke insisted at last upon Vicky's going to bed. She took her up to the neat little blue and white room which she had always hoped might one day be occupied by this beloved little guest.

To-morrow was Monday, and one did not know what the day might hold in store for Vicky. Miss Brigstocke felt certain that Lord Pendre was not likely to accept his daughter's abrupt exit from the stage in a conciliatory spirit. He might even appear. Vicky must have a good night's rest.

Besides, the girl was looking tired and even exhausted. Two bright pink patches burned in her usually pale cheeks, and her eyes shone brilliantly, almost feverishly.

"Vicky, I think you ought to stay in bed late to-morrow morning. Don't dream of getting up for breakfast—Hannah shall bring you up some."

Vicky was lying in bed, and now she stretched out her two white thin arms and clasped them round Miss Brigstocke's neck.

"Very well, Briggy. I feel most awfully sleepy now. But I'm in hopes that Martin may come."

Miss Brigstocke hesitated. She owed a certain measure of loyalty to Lord Pendre for his continued generosity toward her.

"Well, you must get to sleep soon or you'll be fit for nothing to-morrow," she replied.

She kissed her, and was just going toward the door when Vicky called her back:

"Briggy dear, if Dad should take it into his head to follow me, you wouldn't let him come up here, would you?"

"No—no—of course not, dear," murmured Miss Brigstocke mendaciously but soothingly. For she was perfectly aware of her own inability to keep an irate Lord Pendre from his daughter's room should he elect to descend upon them on the morrow. The prospect was almost as unwelcome to her as it was to Vicky.

She went out of the room, closing the door softly behind her. She really hadn't quite liked the look of Vicky to-night—she had such queer flushed cheeks, such an unnatural brightness in her eyes. It even struck her for the first time that the girl might be going to be ill. That would certainly add a perfectly incredible complication to an already sufficiently difficult situation.

This thought, combined with the fear of a possible intrusion from Lord Pendre in his wrath, disturbed the good lady so much that she passed an unusually restless night. And in her dreams she was continually holding the door against Lord Pendre, while Martin Sedgwick was assisting Vicky to escape from the window.

4

Vicky had no inclination to get up when the following morning came. She was only too thankful to remain in bed, with the cool sea wind blowing softly into her room, and the sound of the crisp breaking of the waves falling agreeably upon her ears.

She didn't want any breakfast. Miss Brigstocke and Hannah both tried to coax her into taking some coffee and toast, but she shook her head.

"I'm not really a bit hungry."

"There's really nothing wrong, Hannah," Miss Brigstocke told her faithful servant a little later when she was having her own breakfast in the sitting-room downstairs. "Just a little over-tired, you know, and she's been having rather a bad time lately."

Hannah was reluctant to give her opinion in opposition to such recognized authority, still she could not refrain from shaking her head and saying:

"Can't say as how I liked the look of her myself, miss."

"Oh, she's only a little flushed. It's a very hot day. I shall be glad when August's over."

"Yes, miss," assented Hannah unconvinced.

To her the whole affair was highly mysterious. There had been a telegram on the Saturday morning to ask if it would be convenient to Miss Brigstocke to receive Miss Wingrave, and before tea-time she was already there. And now to be taken ill. . . . Hannah was not easily deceived, despite her apparent agreement that the August heat had had something to do with those flushed cheeks. She had "buried" most of her own relations, and knew illness when she saw it.

"If it 'ud been me I'd have sent for the doctor," muttered the old woman, as she proceeded to the kitchen to consume innumerable cups of tea, and a succulent "kipper." "Not that I believe in them doctors. All talk and nothing doing. I'd rather go to a chemist myself, and get a good bottle of stuff, and have something to show for it."

Miss Brigstocke remained at home with Vicky that morning. She sat in her bedroom sewing, still trying to convince herself that the girl's indisposition was nothing at all—the mere passing result of all the excitement and emotion she had lately experienced. But toward noon a change set in, Vicky became alarmingly talkative, Miss Brigstocke took her temperature, and found that it was very high.

She began to feel really uneasy, and wished that she had not dismissed Hannah's attempted "croaking" in contemptuous silence that morning. It was highly unpleasant to own oneself in the wrong, still it had to be done.

She went down to the sitting-room and rang the bell for Hannah.

"Hannah," she said, as that functionary appeared.

"Yes, miss?"

"I don't think Miss Wingrave's very well."

"No, miss?"

"She's a running a temperature, and she's talking to herself in rather an odd way."

"I'm not at all surprised to hear it, miss," said Hannah, with exasperating meekness.

"Just come up and listen."

They went very softly up the little flight of stairs, and stood on the landing. The door of Vicky's room was closed, but they could hear the shrill sustained monologue within.

"She's delirious, miss, that's what she is. My pore sister—"

Miss Brigstocke interrupted her mercilessly.

"I really think you'd better run round and tell Dr. White to come."

"Very well, miss. But I wouldn't leave her if I was you. They'll sometimes try and throw themselves out of the window when they're like this. I remember my pore brother-in-law—him as married my sister down Shoreham way—"

"I think you'd better put on your things at once. It doesn't matter if lunch is a little late—"

Miss Brigstocke's voice was urgent and authoritative. She knew by heart the episodes that marked the closing days of all Hannah's defunct relations; it was a depressing recital even when she wasn't, as now, extremely anxious.

She went back into the room; the movement roused Vicky.

"Briggy dear, I feel rather queer. I think I've been talking," she murmured, moving her head restlessly. "Do you think I'm ill?"

"I don't think you're very well. I've sent Hannah round to tell Doctor White to come."

"And Mummie—and Martin," murmured Vicky.

She relapsed into silence, and soon fell into an uneasy restless slumber, during which Miss Brigstocke sat by the bedside and waited, devoutly hoping that her "medical man" as she always called him, would soon come to the rescue.

Fortunately he happened to be at home when Hannah arrived, breathless and palpitating, upon the scene. August was seldom a busy month with him, many of his usual patients being away. He put on a hat, went out into the street, leapt on to a bus, and was soon well on his way to Miss Brigstocke's house. Hannah's appearance had impressed him with a sense of urgency even before she informed him that the "Honorable Miss Wingrave" had been "took ill" at Miss Brigstocke's.

He was slightly astonished when he entered the sick-room, to see what was presumably a child lying on the bed. Vicky didn't look more than fifteen, with her short hair tumbled about her face.

Flushed, feverish, inclined to mutter—he saw at a glance that even if the case wasn't serious now, it might speedily become so. He noticed the bright pink patches on the ashen cheeks, the wild beautiful eyes.

"What's the meaning of this, Miss Brigstocke? Came down on Saturday, did she? Then whatever it is she must have brought it with her, if that is any consolation to you!"

Miss Brigstocke had as little terror of illness as any married woman with a large family. She had helped to bring many a child triumphantly through such infantile disorders as chicken-pox, measles, scarlet fever and mumps. She was a competent nurse, assiduous and attentive. But there was something about this sickness of Vicky's in its sudden violence that did frighten her. She seemed to have passed in a few hours from comparative health to terrible and alarming illness.

When he had finished his examination she accompanied him to the door.

"Don't let her see anyone. Keep her as quiet as possible. She must not be in any way excited. I should say she was run down beforehand—why, she's nothing but skin and bone!" He looked inquiringly at Miss Brigstocke, as if hoping that she might throw some light on the subject.

"She's had a good deal of worry," she admitted cautiously.

"Worry? A child like that? She hardly looks fifteen."

"She's eighteen, and she wants to marry one man while her people have been trying to get her to marry another."

"She looks too much of a baby to get married at all," he remarked, slightly astonished that Vicky should already have had to cope with difficult problems. "Well, I'll call in later and see how she is."

"Shall I send for her mother? She's in London."

"Well, it might be advisable. But impress upon her people she's not to talk."

He gave a few instructions and then departed. He had hardly gone when there was a tremendous peal at the bell, followed by a loud knocking at the door. Miss Brigstocke turned pale and trembled. She knew that it must be Lord Pendre, and was fearful lest those ominous sounds, so significant of her parent's approach, should reach Vicky's ears.

CHAPTER XVII

Two Ceremonies

1

MISS BRIGSTOCKE waited on the threshold of the sitting-room to greet Lord Pendre as he entered the house.

With her grey hair naturally wavy and neatly parted above her brow, her kindly grey eyes and fresh color, she was still even at sixty a pleasant wholesome-faced woman. And just now there was a certain dignity about her. She had never felt so little afraid of him, so conscious that she herself was in the right and he very much in the wrong.

Yet he was in a fierce dangerous mood. The eyebrows met across his face in a broad black line. He looked more than ever immense, massive, formidable, full of physical power. A super-man. A man who had made success and wealth his twin gods.

"Where's Vicky? Fetch her at once!" he stormed.

"Will you come in, please, Lord Pendre? I have something to say to you."

Her tone was very quiet, but it held authority. He followed her into the sitting-room. She closed the door and motioned him to a seat.

He shook his head. He preferred to stand there, facing her. It was an exhibition of crass ingratitude on her part that she should befriend his daughter, offering her an asylum in her rebellious flight, even while she was the recipient of his bounty.

When he had dismissed her from Pendre it had been with an inward resolve that she should never see Vicky again. Her influence over the girl was too strong, and it had not always been wisely used. She had shielded her. The thought maddened him. She had held out welcoming arms to the girl when she ought in honor to have declined to receive her. Wasn't she living on his bounty? Hadn't he pensioned her off very handsomely?

"Vicky is here, but you can't see her."

"I'm going to see her! You can't keep her from me. I shall send for the police! I've come to take her home. You haven't the smallest right to keep her." His voice rang in angry crescendo. "Do you suppose I am going to stand any more of this d——d nonsense?"

"Well, then, you can't see her. And it's no use your threatening me with the police. Vicky's ill. She's very ill, and the doctor says no one must go near her."

"Ill? Nonsense! She's shamming—malingering! I'm going to her at once. I shall take her back with me to London." He consulted his watch. "The train leaves in an hour. She must be ready."

He made a sharp movement toward the door. But Miss Brigstocke intercepted him.

"No, Lord Pendre, I'm very sorry, but you mustn't go near her. If you do I can't answer for the consequences. Don't you understand? The sight of you would upset her very much indeed. She's feverish—even delirious—at times. The doctor has only just gone, but if you don't believe me, I'll send for him to come back. He'll tell you more than I can. He'll tell you just how ill she is."

Her quiet tone carried conviction. He sank into a chair, remaining there for some minutes, immersed in thought.

What fresh scheme was he plotting for the subjugation of this child of his? The man was wholly unaccustomed to defeat; he writhed beneath the smart of it. On every hand there seemed to be people ready and willing to interpose between him and his own daughter—just as if he had no right to dictate to her.

Wait till he got her back to Pendre! She would soon learn who was master then. He would subdue this wilful, mutinous, elusive spirit. He sprang suddenly to his feet. Of course it was a plot to keep him from her. What a fool he had been to believe, even for a moment, this legend of her illness! . . .

"This is a plot to prevent my seeing her. You're a wonderful actress—for the moment you completely took me in! . . . But you can't deceive me. You've always behaved like a fool with Vicky, letting her twist you round her little finger. But you shan't take me in. I insist upon seeing her at once."

"Very well. You shall see for yourself. I'll let you look into the room. But you mustn't let her see *you,* on any account."

"You're talking as if I were a monster! I'm Vicky's father, and I'm doing what I know to be best for her."

"Best for her?" she echoed. "You ought to have heard what the doctor said about her just now. Run down before this illness seized her—nothing but flesh and bone! I'm not surprised she's ill after all she's gone through since I left Pendre last spring." Her grey eyes flashed.

"Gone through? What do you mean by 'gone through'?" He emphasized the words ironically.

She looked at him with stern grey eyes. Never before had she so ardently desired to explain to anyone the error of their ways.

"Haven't you done your best to force her into a marriage with a man more than twice her age? Haven't you tried—aren't you still trying—to prevent her from marrying Martin Sedgwick, the man she really loves? You've been deceiving yourself, Lord Pendre. But you shan't hurt her any more, poor darling baby!"

She led the way up the short flight of stairs, and opened the door softly. The silence and hush impressed Lord Pendre against his will; he began to think that, after all, Vicky wasn't perhaps very well, only they were exaggerating her symptoms in order to prevent him from carrying her back to London. However, he wasn't going to have anything of that sort. Vicky would certainly submit directly she saw him. She would know that the game was up! . . .

The blinds were drawn down, and the room into which Lord Pendre could see but dimly was filled with a kind of green twilight. Miss Brigstocke went in ahead of him, and raised her hand with a gesture that forbade him to enter. Unwillingly he obeyed. But he put his head round the open door and looked into the room.

Vicky was lying there with closed eyes. She looked a frail, childish figure, and as if all the strength had gone out of her. Her tiny face was just visible beneath the dark damp mass of hair.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, and gazed beyond Miss Brigstocke toward the door. Her features stiffened with fear —her eyes were wide and wild with terror as if she were beholding some gruesome specter. That face thrust round the door—with its fierce black frowning brows, its black eyes and hair and beard! She gave a piercing scream that rang through the house, and brought Hannah stumbling up the stairs as fast as her aged feet could carry her.

"The shadow . . . . the shadow on the house. . . ." cried Vicky wildly.

She sank back on the pillow and closed her eyes. The specter had vanished. Only her darling old Briggy was bending over her, murmuring soothing tender words. . . .

"Hannah—go back and beg Doctor White to come here. He must see his lordship and explain to him—"

Hannah stumbled away. She followed Lord Pendre down the stairs. He walked slowly, heavily, almost like an old man, and as if his feet had been shod with lead.

The scream echoed in his ears. He could see the ashen face, the dark eyes wide and wild with terror.

And he believed that Vicky was dying, and that he had killed her.

2

There followed days of sharpest anxiety for all those who loved Vicky Wingrave. Hope and fear fluctuated in those loyal hearts.

Eustace brought his mother down to Hove in response to

Miss Brigstocke's urgent telegram. Lady Pendre could not bear the idea of sending her daughter to a nursing home where she would not always be able to obtain access to her. Eustace therefore went to the house-agent's, and rented a furnished house, into which they all moved. A great physician was summoned from London, but he could only confirm Doctor White's diagnosis, that Vicky was suffering from typhoid fever. From the first it was a grave question whether her strength could possibly hold out.

Martin came down on Sundays. He was not at first allowed to see Vicky, and he avoided meeting Lord Pendre, who did not even know of his presence. Eustace always took him for a long walk, and told him all that he could of Vicky's illness. Martin was very busy now at the War Office; he could not get away during the week.

Lady Pendre and Eustace were constantly with Vicky; she never, in her intervals of consciousness, seemed quite at ease if neither of them was in the room. But Lord Pendre never even asked to be admitted. He would not risk a repetition of his former dreadful experience.

He clung rather pitifully to his wife in those days, as if only in her presence could he gain comfort. Whether he reproached himself or suffered even from the elements of remorse, none ever knew. He avoided Eustace, as if he could not meet those stern accusing eyes. He believed that Eustace blamed him for Vicky's illness. It was unjust of course. Typhoid depended upon a germ, and Vicky must have picked up such a germ. But he did not reflect that the girl was in no condition to resist the onslaught of any malady that might assail her. She was worn out with grief and suspense. The germ had fallen upon ripe soil. . . .

Behind all his thoughts there was one great fear. How would his wife emerge from this ordeal? Would it change her—even in her relation to himself? If she were called upon to taste for the second time a tragic grief would she regard it as a castigation—a punishment? Would she come to him again and say: *"It was I who killed her"?*

She was so much in her daughter's room that he saw but little of her, except in the evening. And then when she was with him her silence, her self-control, her repression, terrified him. He felt that she was slipping away. Would she in the end conquer him? Those twenty-seven years during which he had kept her close to him by sheer force of his love, of his overwhelming personality, would perhaps count for nothing if Vicky died. In the inevitable reaction she would return to the old influences, more powerful than all his strength, than all his love. . . .

Sometimes he found it impossible to remain there. The autumn days were very wild and wet; the sea thundered on the beach, not a hundred yards away, with a savage monotonous sound that got on his nerves. If only they were all back at Pendre! He believed that, whatever happened, he should feel less acutely miserable there than in this great hired house on the Brighton sea-front.

The crisis was approaching. For the next few days any change was unlikely. Vicky was very quiet now; she seldom spoke to anyone. She seemed to be growing weaker, just as if life were ebbing stealthily away.

It was a Saturday evening when Lord Pendre decided to return to London. He could not bear the suspense; the atmosphere of anxiety was insupportable. He would return on Monday, he told his wife, and if there was any change they must send for him. It seemed a relief to them all when he drove away to the station.

That evening when Lady Pendre and Eustace were sitting alone after dinner, Martin was announced.

"I managed to get off this afternoon," he said, "and I felt I must come." His face was haggard.

"She's very weak to-night, but no worse," said Lady Pendre.

Always, she seemed to hold her great fear at arm's length. It must never be allowed to come quite near. If it touched her she would be swallowed up in the shadow of it.

Eustace left them alone together. He lit a cigarette and went for a walk along the Hove front. The evening was windy and wet, the long grey promenade was deserted. The lawns were wet and sodden with rain. All along the pavement the sea had flung up sand and shingle and even big pebbles. The tide had run very high that day. The hard surging sound beat in his ears and upon his brain. Over there, in that tall house that faced the sea, Vicky was fighting her grim conflict for life itself. He seemed to see her lying there, white and small and growing weaker. . . .

"Lady Pendre. . . ."

"Yes, Martin?"

"Can't we be married, Vicky and I? I'd rather think she was my wife."

His eyes were bright, hard and tearless. She thought:

"He believes then that she's going to die."

Her throat seemed to close up.

"If you see her to-morrow you can ask her. My husband won't be back till Monday—unless we send for him."

"I'd get a special license. The priest would marry us. I've talked it over with Father Dering."

He sat there, his arms folded.

Whenever he came down now, he was allowed to see Vicky for a few minutes. He said very little, but just sat there, holding her little claw-like hand. Sometimes she would recognize him and utter his name in a faint whisper. But every time he saw her, he felt that she was a little further away . . . the distance between them was increasing . . . her smile was so remote.

"I should like you to marry her now," said Lady Pendre.

When she was his wife Martin could give Vicky things that she herself might not. It was for this reason that he wished to marry her perhaps, even though in all probability she would never be his wife except in name. It was because he didn't want her to die without the Last Sacraments, unshriven.

"You can do so many things for her," she suggested, as he did not speak.

"Yes," he assented dully.

Outside, they could hear the screaming wind scourging the sea; the thunder of the waves.

"To-morrow, then. I'll ask her to-morrow."

He went away. When he had gone, Lady Pendre continued to sit there, waiting for Eustace' return. Always, she had hoped that Martin might evolve some plan of the kind. Now she realized that he had spoken because he believed that Vicky couldn't live. And he wanted to help her to die. She stirred restlessly. She wished that Eustace would come in. . . .

Presently she heard his step on the stair; he entered the room, his face chilled and reddened from contact with that shrill high wind.

"I met Martin. He told me," he said.

She looked at him. She thought he had been crying. But perhaps it was only the keen air outside that had so reddened his eyes.

"Shall you mind?" he said. "It'll take her a little away from us, won't it?"

"I shan't mind. He can do so much for her."

"You'll let him?"

"Yes." She set her mouth firmly. He longed for her to speak. She knew perhaps just what would happen. He felt a kind of envy.

"Mother!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Why didn't you teach her when she was well?"

Again that accusing reproachful look.

"I couldn't teach her." The words dropped from her lips, almost as if she hardly had the strength to utter them.

He went out of the room. Perhaps Father Dering would come on the morrow and receive Vicky into the Church. She was always a little brighter in the morning; she knew people then, sometimes she would even say a few words. He felt envious of Martin because he was going to bring this great joy into her life.

As he passed up the stairs, he saw a light under Vicky's door. He knocked softly and one of the nurses came to open it.

"May I come in?" he said.

"Just for a moment. She's not asleep yet."

He went up to the bedside. Vicky was lying there, looking like some frail woodland flower over which a heavy storm had broken.

"Eustie. . . ."

"Yes, darling."

"Don't go away, Eustie."

He sat down by her side, laying his hand upon hers. For many hours, long after she had sunk into slumber, he remained thus, not daring to move for fear of disturbing her.

4

"Vicky, darling."

"Yes, Martin?"

Her somber eyes met his with a faint gleam of recognition.

"Would you let our marriage take place now?"

"Now?"

"To-morrow. The priest would come here and marry us. I want you to be my wife, Vicky—to feel you belong to me."

"I should be safe then?"

"Quite safe."

"I mean—they couldn't separate us, no matter how hard they tried? I should belong to you?"

"Forever . . . . Vicky darling. No one could separate us except God."

"Martin. . . ."

"Yes, darling?"

"Couldn't I be a Catholic first?"

"Oh, my dear, this very day if you wish it!"

"Then to-day. Tell Mummie and Eustie."

Presently he left her and went in search of Lady Pendre. He found her with her son in the drawing-room. He and Eustace had both been to an early Mass together that morning. The weather had cleared. There were bars of sunlight illuminating the stormy darkness of the sea.

"I've spoken to Vicky," he said, advancing into the room.

"She wishes to be received first. Should you have any objection?"

His blue eyes met Lady Pendre's in a straight square glance.

"You must do as you think best."

She sat down near the window gazing out on to the sea. She looked, he thought, like some figure of destiny, immovable in her calm, her detachment. Watching. . . . Neither helping nor hindering. Thinking her own secret thoughts, like some unsmiling sphinx.

"I thought it might be to-day. And then if it can be arranged we could be married to-morrow morning."

So he had taken the law into his own hands. Whether Vicky lived or died she belonged to him. And his love, deep and ardent, was to be the human instrument that should bring to her these transcendent gifts. Love that had "robbed" her own life of "immortal things" had brought them to Vicky.

Vicky seemed a little better that day, and if anything a trifle stronger, but Martin saw in this no excuse for delay. He went round to see Father Dering, who promised to come at ten o'clock.

Lady Pendre received him in the drawing-room. She had not spoken to a priest since her marriage. He was an elderly man, tall, stooping slightly, with grey hair and very kind, wise eyes.

Some priests, as she knew, had a curious faculty for penetrating into the souls of those with whom they were brought into contact. There were strange stories of priests in the confessional being able to remind their penitents of some sin they had forgotten or omitted to confess. She had a nervous fear lest those kind, wise, visionary eyes should discover her own secret.

"My daughter is very ill," she said, in a low hurried voice, and speaking with some emotion. You'll make it as short as possible, won't you?"

"Certainly. There is a very short and simple profession of faith which suffices in the case of a sick person. May I go up to her now? I shall hear her confession first, and then you can come for the conditional baptism."

He glanced at the three faces. Martin was the first to answer.

"We shall be on the landing—you can tell us when you're ready Father."

"I would rather not be there," said Lady Pendre.

Her face was ashen white, and so were her lips. She seemed to be struggling with an emotion she could not suppress. She watched them as they went out of the room.

She sat there, waiting. Vicky, making her first stumbling confession. Always perhaps more difficult for a convert than for one who had approached that Sacrament as a little child, taught and trained. The brief profession of faith. . . . The conditional baptism. . . . The simple things that had such enduring results. . . . Admission. . . . *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . . .*

Vicky—the child of an apostate—was to be received into the Church of her own will on what might prove to be her deathbed. She would not die, as Phip had died, outside, never knowing the consolation to which he had had so great a right. She would taste the full sweetness of those Sacraments. When Lady Pendre thought of Vicky now, her heart seemed to stir with a strange thankfulness.

She sank upon her knees and prayed. . . .

There were footsteps on the stairs and she rose from her knees and went to the door. Father Dering came toward her, followed by Eustace.

"I don't think you'll find her any the worse, Lady Pendre. and she's quite wonderfully happy," said the priest.

"I am sure she is. I think she's been wishing for this for some time past."

"I must thank you," he said, "for making no difficulties. May Almighty God reward you!" He paused and then added: "Of course if she gets worse I can come at any time to give her the Holy Viaticum, the Last Sacraments. But unless there's any change I shall bring her Holy Communion tomorrow morning."

Lady Pendre gave a little start. She thought of that scene in Brussels so many, many years ago. She saw herself, a child, younger than Vicky by several years, waiting for the priest to come. The little altar, the crucifix, the flowers, the lights . . . and then the gleam of the silver Pyx.

A strong shiver shook her from head to foot.

"That will be very kind of you," she said mechanically, in an odd withdrawn tone.

And again she had that curious fear that he could look into her soul and see it all darkened and stained and impure with the sin of apostasy. And she remembered that as a child she had been taught that a soul in mortal sin would be more horrible to look upon if it were visible than a body decomposed by death. It was a dead soul that could not know the Grace of God. And all its works were dead. . . .

Vicky's soul was beautiful now; it was in a state of grace. It was far, far more beautiful than her frail little wasted body. God's Hand had touched it in Baptism. . . .

She gave a low sob and turned abruptly away.

5

That night Lady Pendre went up stairs, carrying a little tray. Mechanically she began to put everything in readiness for the morrow. She could visualize in every detail the little altar with its lights and flowers that had made a spot of strangely shining light in that room at the top of an old high house in Brussels.

It had to be done, and no one knew so well how to do it as she. All the time she was silently at work she was humbled by the sense of her own unworthiness to prepare for anything so holy. It seemed to her that her very fingers must soil the whiteness of the linen cloth as she spread it over the table, and tarnish the silver vases with their white blossoms.

There was no crucifix. She had not possessed such a thing since her marriage. She had never willingly looked upon one until that evening at Pendre when Eustace had suddenly shown her the one he wore and told her it had been indulgenced for the hour of death. Something had constrained her then to stoop and kiss the Feet. Did he ever think of that episode and wonder what it meant? Surely it must have startled and astonished him. But she had often thought that Eustace suspected something of the truth. . . .

The little table was in the dressing-room that adjoined Vicky's room, so that her preparations did not disturb the invalid. To-morrow morning when the priest came it could easily be moved into the bedroom. She had just finished her task when Martin came in. They often sat in the dressing-room so as to be near at hand, and yet not disturb Vicky with their presence.

"There's everything but the crucifix and holy water," she said. "I've put this little silver bowl for the holy water. Perhaps the priest will bring some."

"I've got a crucifix at my lodgings," said Martin, "and I'll bring the holy water when I come back from Mass in the morning."

"Oh, you're not going back to London to-night?"

"No. I've got leave for a few days. You see, I felt I might be wanted here."

His young face had a grim hard look. Never once had he shown any sign of breaking down. He was rigidly self-controlled, although he believed, as she knew, that Vicky could not live.

They sat there waiting. No sound came from the sick-room. From time to time Martin bestowed upon Lady Pendre a quick searching glance. She had prepared everything in readiness for the morning—this woman who had scarcely allowed her children to mention religion to her. She had known exactly what was wanted, what was necessary. She knew that Our Blessed Lord was coming to Vicky on the morrow. She had made ready for that Coming with a Martha-like assiduity. There was a strange, almost stern, purpose about her.

Never before, he thought, had he ever felt such a deep measure of anxiety for any human soul. He was almost certain that she was astray in the wilderness. He longed to speak to her. But her coldness repelled him.

Was this the price she had paid for all the wealth and ease and luxury of her life? And how far had these things, so dearly bought, satisfied her? For was it not her perfidy, her betrayal, that had caused the shadow on the house from which, one by one, her children were making their escape? . . .

"You'll be there to-morrow morning?" he hazarded. "Vicky would like it, you know."

She shook her head.

"I can't—I can't—I'm sorry, Martin. . . ."

She rose quickly and went out of the room.

Father Dering had said he would come early, and Lady Pendre rose at seven and waited for his arrival in the dining-room, which led out of the hall. She left the door ajar, and every now and then she rose and looked out of the window to see if he was within sight.

On the table near her there were two tall candlesticks, each holding a lighted taper.

Presently Eustace looked in.

"Oh, you're there, Mother?"

"Yes. Will you take this candle? Hold it when you open the door." She gave him these brief instructions in a mechanical tone.

"But why shouldn't you? We could both go." He looked at her wistfully. Why should she stand aside in this way, and leave everything to Martin and himself? Was it from some mistaken sense of loyalty to her husband?

"No—no—it's better you should do it. You—and Martin if he's here in time."

"There's Martin!" said Eustace, as that tall upright figure passed the window, walking at a swinging pace. He ran and opened the front door.

"Oh, there you are, Martin! Mother's put these candles ready for us."

Martin followed him into the dining-room.

"Good-morning, Lady Pendre. I've brought the crucifix and holy water."

"Would you take them up?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes."

He ran out of the room and up the three flights of stairs that led to the big front room where Vicky lay. He went softly into the dressing-room and placed the crucifix upon the table, and poured some holy water into the little silver bowl. Everything was in readiness. He gave the nurse instructions to light the candles directly she heard the procession coming up the stairs.

"How is she to-day?" he asked.

"She's had a very quiet night, and she seems peaceful and happy."

Eustace and Martin received Father Dering, holding the lighted candles in their hands and genuflecting as he entered the house. The door into the dining-room was still open and they became conscious that Lady Pendre was standing there watching them. But in the moment that Father Dering passed, she fell upon her knees, crossed herself, and remained kneeling with bowed head.

She knelt there as one whom grief and remorse have turned to stone, still and motionless, with a white frozen face. She heard them pass and go up the stairs. She heard the priest's voice reciting Latin words. It seemed to her that no punishment could be more terrible than her enforced inevitable separation from Vicky now. She longed to be with her. Vicky would perhaps notice her absence, and wonder at the cause of it.

After twenty-seven years of apostasy and denial she had found herself once more in the Divine Presence. She remembered those words, *"And the Lord turning looked on Peter,"*—they cut her to the heart. Yet how could she repent and return? She was, indeed, as Martin had guessed, astray in the wilderness.

6

Later in the morning there was a very simple brief little ceremony in Vicky's room. Lady Pendre had dressed her daughter in a white silk wrap and put a veil of white lace on her head. Eustace was present, and the two nurses. The doctor had utterly disapproved, declaring that his patient had already had far too much excitement, and that her heart wouldn't stand it. He refused to answer for the consequences.

When it was over and Lady Pendre and her son had left the room with Father Dering, Martin found himself alone with his little bride. She was very tranquil and smiling, and as he approached the bedside she held out her hand with the gold wedding ring on the third finger.

"Martin!"

He knelt there, kissing her hand.

"I am yours now, Martin," she said.

"Yes, my precious one."

"I shan't mind dying now. You've brought me such good gifts. . . ."

"Oh, don't talk of dying, Vicky darling. You're to get well and strong . . . we shall be so happy."

"We've had this happiness," she murmured.

"Yes, yes."

"You must help Eustie. I think he's on the way."

"I know he is, Vicky."

"How I wish Mummie could come too. . . ."

He was silent. In his mind he seemed to see her kneeling there in the doorway, her face turned to stone.

"We must pray for her," he said at last.

"Martin. . . ."

"Yes, my own?"

"The shadow seems to have gone. I see such a wonderful light."

She leaned back and closed her eyes.

It was the worst day of all—the day when hope was at its lowest ebb. Vicky was very quiet and peaceful; the fever had left her, but she was completely exhausted, and her pulse was barely perceptible.

They sat for the most part in the dressing-room so as not to disturb her, and every now and then Martin would rise and go into her room and kneel by the bedside praying. He could not tell if she realized that he was there; she made no sign.

Since that brief conversation just after their marriage, she had hardly said a word to anyone. But he thought that, whatever happened, he should always remember those last words she had spoken to him: *"The shadow seems to have gone . . . I see such a wonderful light. . . ."*

CHAPTER XVIII

Anxiety

1

AS LORD PENDRE did not return that day, a respite for which Martin at any rate was devoutly thankful, his wife sent him a telegram early on the Tuesday morning, telling him that he had better come and bring Barbara with him, as Vicky was decidedly weaker.

A few hours brought them to the house on the Brighton front. As Lord Pendre drove up to the great cream stucco dwelling that had stood there since the days—such palmy ones for Brighton—of the Regency, he half-involuntarily glanced up at the windows. Windows had their own sure tale to tell when there was tragedy within. But the house presented a perfectly normal aspect; only the blind in the sick-room was drawn down.

September was nearing its end, and the day was very calm, with a light haze over the sea. Some fishing-boats with heavy red sails were anchored just beyond the West Pier, and their reflections were accurately delineated in the glassy water. Westward the long low shore dipping to Worthing was delicately drawn in grey and chalk-white, almost like a sketch in silver-point.

The father and daughter mounted the stairs. Lord Pendre looked for the first time a trifle aged. Always he had the fear that his wife or Eustace might reproach him for his harsh treatment of Vicky. He had only tried to mould her, to break her in, as one might a young and restive colt, and under the strain of this discipline she had fallen sick—sick unto death.

He had broken her heart, not her spirit; her brave young spirit still eluded him, and now perhaps would elude him forever.

He was thankful for Barbara's company and support; she had always approved of him, upheld his authority; she was the only one except darling Phip, who had inherited his own clear intelligence and horse-sense, and saw things exactly as they were.

A great hush prevailed in the house, which was full of that tense, expectant atmosphere inseparable from any place where there is severe and critical illness.

As they entered the drawing-room Lady Pendre detached herself from a little group of people who were standing near the window, and advanced toward them. Almost immediately Eustace followed her; the third figure, a young man, seemed to hang back for a moment as if uncertain what step he should take. But Lady Pendre indicated him, saying:

"You remember Major Sedgwick, Hugo?"

Martin came forward and bowed to Lord Pendre and Barbara. Of course he knew that his presence was less than welcome, but he had a right to be near Vicky now, and he felt that he would allow no insult to accelerate his departure.

Lord Pendre frowned slightly; he made no comment. But the next moment he turned to his wife and said:

"How is she?"

"She's asleep . . . she had a very bad night, and she seems weaker."

"I shall see her presently?"

"Yes, presently. Hugo—come into my room, won't you? I've something to say to you."

He followed her out of the room and into a small sitting-room across the landing. It was at the back of the house and looked over a tiny square patch of garden. Just a strip of lawn with a sun-dial in the middle; a few bushes of euonymus. . . .

Above the garden and the roofs of the houses that reared themselves beyond it, there was a strip of very pale blue sky, unbroken by cloud.

"Why's that fellow here?" demanded Lord Pendre, angrily.

"He's every right to be here, Hugo. You mustn't mind. They . . . they were married yesterday morning." She made the statement very simply, as if relating some quite commonplace event.

He stared, and then broke into a short unpleasant laugh.

"Married indeed! That sort of marriage isn't legal. Who on earth married them?"

"Father Dering."

"Father Dering?" He repeated the words incredulously. Then: "One of these High Church men, I suppose?"

"No—a Catholic priest."

"A Catholic priest? You've let a Catholic priest come into my house, Giselda?" A cold fear clutched his heart.

"It was Martin's doing, not mine. He has been a Catholic for some months—he arranged it all."

"You knew this—when you encouraged the engagement?" His temper was rising.

"I didn't know until he came that day to Hill Street, with Eustace. He told me then he'd been received while he was in Malta."

"And in spite of this you encouraged it?"

"I couldn't help it. Vicky had been in love with him for years. It made no difference to her—even when I explained all that it would entail."

He was thinking less then of his daughter, of her critical illness, than of the effect all this would have upon his wife.

"It's just the sort of fool thing a d—d blighter like that would do!" he exclaimed, raising his powerful voice so that it seemed to ring through the room, disturbing the echoes of that hushed and silent house.

She laid her hand on his arm as if entreating him to be quiet. It was an outrage that he should permit his vindictive wrath to get the better of him when death was hovering so near. How could he let such things anger him now? Ought he not rather to feel thankful that his little daughter should have had this last crumb of earthly happiness to assure her of Martin's enduring love? . . .

"Hugo—there is something else. But please—please, don't talk so loud . . . they might hear you upstairs."

"What is it?" All the time he was afraid of what she might have to tell him.

"Vicky was received into the Church on Sunday—the day before her marriage. She and Martin both wished it. Father Dering came to receive her. The child was so happy—so peaceful. The first of our children—"

Her grave eyes looked at him with a sort of dreadful calmness.

"I told you once, didn't I, how strongly hereditary Catholicism is? I knew it was bound to come out sooner or later in one or more of them."

He caught her hand and held it as if in a vice.

"Was this your doing? Tell me the truth! You've gone against me—you've broken your promises?"

"You're hurting me, Hugo." She freed her hand; there was a red mark on the wrist—she bruised easily. "No—I had nothing whatever to do with it. But Martin had spoken of religion to Vicky when they were first engaged—he's a very good Catholic, very much in earnest, like so many of these clever thinking young men who were in the War. Naturally he wanted Vicky to have this—this grace. But he used no pressure—she herself suggested that she should be received before they were married. Yesterday morning she had the Holy Viaticum—her First Communion. If she gets worse Father Dering will administer Extreme Unction."

"Never in my house!"

"She's Martin's wife now. He has a right to decide these things for her. A greater right than we have. You must let him do as he thinks best."

"You'll never get me to believe that this wasn't a put-up job between you and Martin! I know what it is when you Holy Romans get together—the plotting and scheming that goes on!"

"You must believe what you choose. Only, Hugo, I wish to God that I had had some part in it—that I'd been allowed to help Vicky. But I couldn't. I had to stand aside and let Martin do all that I ought to have done for my own child."

He relented then; his old fear came over him.

"Don't think of it like that, Giselda darling. You chose another path . . . other duties."

She was silent; she was thinking deeply of that moment yesterday morning when Father Dering had entered the house, bearing with him the Most Holy. Oh, those words that had come to her mind then in all their love, in all their bitterness! *And the Lord turning looked on Peter* . . . Such a look of love, of reproach, of entreaty . . . even of pardon. Calling her . . . calling her, so that it was difficult not to cast aside the love of twenty-seven years and follow Him . . . even to martyrdom. For never in all the days of her devout Catholic life had she been so passionately aware of the Divine Presence as she had been yesterday. It was as if He had passed close to her, and she had not even dared to stretch out her hand and touch the Hem of that Garment—dyed purple in the winepress—and ask for healing and absolution. . . .

Lord Pendre said in a calmer tone:

"You ought never to have allowed this priest to come into the house. In that way you could have prevented all these things from happening!"

She was silent, knowing that she would not have lifted a finger to prevent his coming.

"Did you see him, yourself?"

"Twice."

"You spoke to him?"

"Just a few words, each time. Not of course when he came in—bringing the Blessed Sacrament." She looked at him with strange eyes. "I just knelt down."

"Giselda, my love, don't, *don't* think of it!"

"How can I help thinking of it, when Vicky is dying? I can only thank God that if she does die she won't go unabsolved, unfortified, like Phip. . . ."

"You're tired—overwrought—anxious about Vicky. When you're normal again and back at Pendre you'll forget—"

"I can never forget."

He was suggesting impossibilities, and they both knew it. Never as long as she lived could she forget that Coming yesterday. How she had knelt down in an anguish of remorse and contrition, hiding her guilty face. How her heart had seemed to cry out: *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof.* . . . The words of the Roman centurion commemorated daily all over the world in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

"You *must* forget. Our life—our very happiness—depends upon it."

He put his arms about her and kissed her. Her face was very cold. They sat there together, in silence, listening. . . .

Then another idea occurred to him and he exclaimed sharply:—

"I hope Eustace hasn't seen too much of what's been going on. After that escapade with Miss Tresham in the spring, one can never tell what he may be thinking of!"

"He and Martin are great friends. I think he knows all there is to know."

"Giselda, you talk sometimes as if you *wished* your children to become Catholics! Wouldn't that, according to your own notions, be like putting a sword into their hands to be used against yourself?"

"Yes. But I must wish for it, all the same," she answered dully. "Even if it made them hate me—despise me. But it could never do that." Her eyes brightened a little. They might blame her, but they would never desert her, never cease to hope that some day they might win her back. . . .

"I should never allow it—you can tell Eustace that! A girl's different—she goes away with her husband—she changes her name. But a son, a son who inherits title and property—that would be impossible!"

She did not answer. She was thinking of Eustace standing there with the lighted candle in his hand, then kneeling, his head bowed, his face aglow with joy. If she had ever doubted it before, she had known then that he had the Faith.

"Has he shown any signs—?"

"He has said nothing to me lately except to ask me why I didn't teach Vicky about it while she was well."

"Then he knows you know—? He suspects?"

"He has suspected for a long time. Ever since he first came home from the War, and he felt there was something wrong. A shadow on the house . . . that's what they called it. Directly the children began to think about religion for themselves, they were bound to suspect something."

She was right. Since Eustace' return from the War things had never seemed quite the same at Pendre. There had been clouds . . . shadows. They had been working up to some unknown and invisible crisis. Lord Pendre had felt he had lost his old grip of the situation. The children no longer responded to his stern authority. They questioned, objected, secretly rebellious. And now in the midst of this crisis, from which he could not tell whether his daughter would emerge alive or dead, the Catholic Church had thrust her authority, her power, into his house, against him . . . claiming his child. . . .

2

There was a knock at the door and a nurse appeared on the threshold.

"Could you come up, please, Lady Pendre? She's asking for you."

Lady Pendre hurried upstairs, and her husband followed her into the dressing-room. She made a little gesture as if to entreat him not to come any further.

Remembering the terrible little scene at Miss Brigstocke's, he obeyed her. He had no wish for a repetition of that—it was enough to destroy the strongest nerves.

Lady Pendre went into the bedroom, closing the door softly behind her. She was alone with Vicky.

"Mummie—Mummie—I want you . . ."

"Yes, darling, I'm here."

"But I don't mean that. I want you with me. Not outside. Not in the shadow." Her face was puzzled, baffled, as if she did not quite know how to explain her meaning.

But Lady Pendre grasped it. It pierced her heart.

"My darling . . . ."

"Mummie, you weren't always in the shadow. You must come back. Our Lord is waiting. I felt yesterday that He wanted you. . . ."

Sometimes when death drew near with its great illumination it was able to bestow a new and unaccountable knowledge upon the mind. Lady Pendre felt that this must be the case with her daughter now. She was so detached from earth that she had a clearer vision, like one who watches distant happenings from afar. And in this way she had been enabled to lift the veil a little from her mother's closely-guarded secret.

Lady Pendre sank upon her knees. Was Vicky going to die? And was this her last message to her, mystically suggested? She, the newly-initiated, saw perhaps with clearer eyes the things that belonged to her Faith. She was able to speak with a certain authority. And she was calling to her. She knew now perhaps the source and nature of the shadow that for so long had hung over Pendre.

"We mustn't be divided in Heaven . . ."

Vicky sank back, white and exhausted, her dark eyes closed, a faint sweet smile upon her lips. For the moment Lady Pendre believed that she had died thus without a struggle, that the feeble young heart had ceased to beat.

She sprang up and ran into the dressing-room, calling "Nurse—Nurse!"

The nurse hurried into the sick-room without a word. Lord Pendre grasped his wife's arm; he thought she was going to faint.

"My dear, what's the matter? Is she worse?"

"Oh, she's dying, Hugo—she's dying." She was sobbing in his arms.

He held her as they went to the open door of Vicky's room. Lord Pendre looked stealthily in. And he felt that unless someone had assured him that the little doll-like figure on the bed was his own child he would never have recognized her. Her tiny face was small and shrunken, and of a yellowish-white color resembling ancient wax. The hair was closely cut like a boy's, indicating the shape of her small head and incredibly diminishing its size. The black penciled brows and long black lashes made four narrow dark horizontal lines upon the pallid whiteness of her face. She looked older and shrunken, and at the same time childishly small and young. Her little hands, lying upon the silken bedspread, were like thin claws.

He turned abruptly away, and went back into the dressing-room, sitting there with his head buried in his hands so that only the black thatch of hair was visible. He hardly noticed anyone. Someone went to the telephone on the landing below and rang up the doctor; he could hear the urgent, one-sided conversation. People passed him, going in and out of the sick-room. Martin, Eustace, his wife, Barbara, the nurses, and at last the doctor. He saw them through the chinks in his fingers, though he was hardly aware of it. Vicky was dying . . . What effect would this have upon his wife?

Even now it was difficult for him to realize that Vicky was Martin's wife. What a strange unconventional thing—a death-bed marriage! He had read and even heard of such things, but he had never dreamed that they could happen in his own house. It was of course, because the Church wanted to claim Vicky at any cost, alive or dead. And with a Catholic husband to protect her rights, their task was made all the easier. Ah, how he hated the Catholic Church and all that it stood for, with its pretended rights over the souls of men! The one thing whose power he had always felt to be greater than his own. All his wealth was of no avail against it. He did not believe in its Divine foundation, nevertheless there was something in the mysterious nature of its power that baffled him. And he had always feared that one day it would assert its ancient authority over his wife and take her away from him.

Someone touched him on the shoulder. He looked up; it was Eustace.

"Just a fainting-fit, Dad. She's most awfully weak, and of course her heart—. But the doctor's given her an injection.

3

Even Barbara had lost something of her hard brightness at this crisis. Of course she had never been very sympathetic to her sister, but the grave danger of death that threatened her, naturally elicited anxiety and pity; it was always sad when a girl died on the very threshold of life. And Vicky hadn't had a very happy life. It was her own fault, of course; she could never accept things quite simply and submissively, she was always rebellious, on the defensive. . . .

Barbara blamed no one for her sister's illness. She took a perfectly normal commonplace view of the situation. Vicky may have had a not unnatural fear that she was going to be forced to marry a man she disliked, while she was apparently in love with another whom she would never be allowed to marry. But these two things combined could never give her typhoid fever, so there could be no sort of relation between her unhappiness and her illness. She had simply picked up a germ. London, like all great cities, was full of germs. Even the dust of country places was not free from them. One had to take one's chances, and really, considering the fearful dangers that menaced one on every side, it was astonishing that so many people attained to a ripe old age!

It would therefore be absurd of her father to feel any remorse—as this morning on the journey down he had actually threatened to do—just because he had had such rows with Vicky lately about Ernest Soames. One didn't want to be unkind, of course, but Vicky could really be very trying. If anyone was to blame she was. She had brought it on herself.

In the afternoon Eustace took her for a walk along the front. It was useless for them both to remain indoors, and Barbara had shown signs of growing restlessness. She did not like to suggest going back to London when they were all so anxious; she supposed that she had better stay for one night at least. It wasn't much good, as she wasn't allowed to speak to Vicky, who was to be kept absolutely quiet, and naturally couldn't talk to anyone.

"I wonder Major Sedgwick likes to hang about in this way just now, Eustie," she remarked. "It must be odious to Dad to have him. I was quite thankful he didn't appear at luncheon."

"Well, he's got a jolly good right to be here, if you want to know," replied her brother, rather astonished to find that Barbara knew nothing of the marriage.

But everyone had been so occupied and anxious, that there had really been no opportunity of telling her. Vicky had given them all a fright that morning with her prolonged fit of unconsciousness, during which the pulse had been scarcely perceptible.

Barbara drew herself up. She was a tall woman, and in her beautiful moleskin coat she looked a very fashionable figure, indeed almost extravagantly thin and slight.

"He'll never be allowed to marry Vicky, even if the poor child does get better. And I must say it's bad form of him to show himself when Dad's here—it's taking a mean advantage, because he knows he can't say anything to him."

"Martin's got more right to be with Vicky than any of us," said Eustace.

Barbara smiled. Her ill-humor was always quickly over.

"Don't be absurd, Eustie dear," she said coaxingly.

"I'm not absurd. But, you see, Vicky happens to be Martin's wife. I expect Dad knows it by this time too. They were married yesterday morning."

"Married!" Her mouth dropped open. She glanced sharply at Eustace, but she could see by his grave serious face that he meant every word he said. "Married? What do you mean?"

"Just that. The priest came yesterday morning—an awfully good sort, called Father Dering. Martin had a special license."

"A *priest!*" repeated Barbara. A Catholic priest?"

"Yes, very naturally, since they're both Catholics. Martin was received while he was in Malta this year, and Vicky on Sunday morning."

"She couldn't have known what she was doing!" exclaimed Barbara indignantly.

"Well, we think she did. She asked to be received before she was married. Martin, you see, had talked to her about it when he saw her again in London."

"But it can't count—any of it!" she said, and now there was a note of relief in her voice. "We can always prove afterward that she was too ill to know what she was doing—that both these things were forced upon her by Martin. No one pays any attention to death-bed ceremonies, and Vicky was supposed to be dying."

"With Catholics marriage is a Sacrament. And Vicky knew quite well what she was doing. She was all in white—Mother made her look too sweet. And they were both so calm and brave—their voices never faltered." His eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Do you mean to say Mother had a hand in it?" inquired Barbara, with a touch of indignation.

"Certainly. She knew what was going on—she didn't seem to mind."

"I suppose she preserved a sphinx-like attitude all through the proceedings?" she asked satirically.

"She didn't say much," he admitted cautiously. "But I think somehow she wasn't against it. Although she wasn't present herself, she put everything ready for Father Dering when he brought Vicky the Holy Viaticum."

"Dear Eustie, how simply awful to think we have such things in the family now. Priests, and the confessional and things like that. I do hope nothing has been said in front of the servants. They would think it all so queer!"

"Does it matter what they think?" He could hardly restrain a smile.

They walked on a little way in silence, and than Barbara said:

"Poor Dad—how he will hate it all! And it's been done behind his back, too, in such an underhand kind of way. I really wonder at Mother permitting it. He hates the Catholic religion, and he can't bear Martin Sedgwick, and now he's got both in the family."

Barbara was much more perturbed than she cared to show. There seemed such a distinct want of balance somewhere, and she had always hoped that she and her family were perfectly normal and well-poised. What would Gerard think of them all? He so disliked any deviation from the conventional rut, hard-headed business man that he was. These untoward, unconventional happenings would be certain to arouse his bitterest scorn.

To be received into the Catholic Church, and married on what might well prove to be her death-bed, were actions of which only people of Vicky's perversity were capable. She couldn't have known what she was doing—whatever Eustace might say to the contrary. She was too young—only eighteen, and absurdly childish for her age. They could easily prove undue influence. She had always had this silly slavish admiration and hero-worship for Martin ever since he first came to Pendre. He could make her do whatever he liked even then. Barbara was angry with her sister, but she was far more angry with Martin.

"If only she'd married Ernest Soames last June when Dad wanted her to, none of this need ever have happened," she remarked bitterly.

How could she return home and relate such a story as this to Gerard? He wasn't very fond of her family at the best of times, with the solitary exception of her father, for whom he had a very genuine admiration. He was always asking why that blighter Eustace did nothing but loaf about at Pendre, or saying what a queer passionate temper Vicky had. Gerard wasn't likely to receive these fresh exhibitions of eccentricity in silence, and she dreaded in anticipation his sarcastic comments.

"Well, we'd better go back now, and see how they're getting on," Eustace remarked presently. He never liked being away from the house for long at a time. There was always the dreadful fear that the heart might fail suddenly. And yet, with it all, his hope was very strong. He couldn't believe, as Martin so evidently did, that Vicky was going to die. . . .

4

As they approached the house they saw Martin standing at the dining-room window, as if awaiting their return. When he saw them he disappeared, and a second later had flung open the front door to receive them. He hardly seemed to notice Barbara, but seized Eustace' hand, grasping it almost fiercely.

"Eustace!" he said.

Then his strong self-control, which had never deserted him all through these days of bitter anxiety, gave way utterly; the tears poured down his hard bronzed cheeks; he seemed unable to speak. . . .

Eustace' face had gone deathly white. He thought: "He's going to tell me that she's dead. It was madness to go out—"

"Oh, Eustace—the doctor, says she's better. She's got a sporting chance! Thank God! . . . Thank God! . . ."

Barbara felt an odd lump in her throat. It was horrible to see a man cry, especially a man of such proven valor and courage as Martin Sedgwick. She slipped past them into the house, and hurried up the stairs. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

In Rome

1

IT WAS not, however, until December that Vicky was well enough to leave Brighton. Martin obtained a few weeks' leave, and took her to the south of France, to bask for a time in the sunlight, far from the scene of her long distressing illness.

Eustace went back to Pendre for Christmas, more for his mother's sake than for his own. He too was feeling the reaction after those days and weeks of fierce anxiety. And there still remained the pressing question of his own future to solve.

Almost immediately after his return he ascertained that Mrs. Dyrham had gone abroad, taking Miss Tresham with her. Her house was shut up. Pamela was back at Pendre, delighted to find herself within those hospitable walls after so many disagreeable months at West Kensington. Secretly she was turning her eyes Soames-ward once more, this time with an increase of hope. Soames had shown lately that he was at least aware of her. They met sometimes in Llyn, for he did not often come now to Pendre. He still had the feeling that he had been badly treated, and his old friendship for Lord Pendre seemed to be a thing of the past.

Christmas had gone; the old year, which had been such an eventful one for them, had passed away. January had set in, bleak and wintry. It was not till then that Eustace divulged his plan of going abroad to his mother.

"But I don't know what your father will say," she said in a tone of mildest remonstrance; "he's been hoping so, that you'd soon go north. Of course, he understood it wasn't possible while Vicky was ill. . . ."

"I put off going abroad in the first instance because of Vicky, or you know I should have gone last year. How splendid it is to think she's so happy!" His face kindled.

"Yes. I think she's got everything to make her happy," said Lady Pendre. "Everything, that is, except money."

She was a little troubled at times about the finances of the young couple. Lord Pendre could only be induced to give his daughter the smallest of dress-allowances, and this prolonged stay in the South must have strained their resources to the uttermost. Still, they had never complained. Vicky was growing stronger every day; she wrote and said she was happier than she had ever thought it possible to be.

"Where shall you go, Eustie?"

"Oh, I think I shall look in on them at Menton and then go on to Rome," he answered.

"To Rome!" she echoed.

"Yes—I've always wanted to go there."

"How shall you manage?"

"I've got my gratuity intact. When that's gone I shall come back and look for a job if Dad refuses to have me at Wingrave's."

"But why should he refuse?"

"Mummie, you know he'll never have me there when I'm a Catholic."

He went up to her then, sat at her feet near the fire, and leaned his head against her knees, just as he had done when he was a little boy. And she stretched out her hand, just as she had done in the old days, and stroked his thick dark hair, with a soft and caressing gesture.

"So you still think you'll be one, Eustie?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure. I've known I should be for ages. Mother—I wish there was some hope of you—!" He threw back his head and looked smilingly into her face.

She drew back her hand sharply, and said:

"Of *me?*"

"Yes. I've often felt you'd have so little to learn.

She was silent. She could not tell him. Less now than ever. What would he think of her, full as he was of the ardor of the intending convert? Would he not be filled with horror and dismay? She remembered then with a kind of anguish Vicky's words: *"You weren't always in the shadow . . . you must come back . . . Our Lord is waiting . . . I felt yesterday that He wanted you . . ."*

All that time of Vicky's illness seemed to her now like a prolonged and dreadful dream. There were moments of illumination, of course—the day Vicky was received—the morning when Father Dering brought the Holy Viaticum into the house where she, an apostate, was waiting to receive him. But the torture, the anguish of mind she had endured then, had faded a little. She had come home to take up the old duties, the old life. Environment had not been without its effect upon her. She had no wild yearnings now, such as she had known in those days at Brighton. No desire to go away and meet her martyrdom. She had just crept back to Pendre . . . glad to be there.

Now Eustace, the last to leave the nest, was going from her. How could she bear it? More and more had she learned to depend upon him, to lean on his young strength. Eustace, the dearest of all . . .

"I don't want Dad to know till I come back," he said; "it'll only make things harder for you. I'll tell him that I must have a change. It's been a pretty bad time for us all this autumn."

That night at dinner he told his father of his intended journey. Lord Pendre frowned heavily and said:

"What on earth do you want to go away for? You've been idle now for nearly a year. You ought to be getting to work."

Events had changed him but little. The silver in his hair and beard was slightly more plentiful than it had been, but his eyes still flashed with their old fire; he had lost nothing of his fierce autocratic temper. Vicky was not yet fully forgiven; he hoped there would be no talk of her visiting Pendre for a long time to come. He wasn't prepared to have Catholics there, even if one of them was his own daughter. He had hoped that when she came to her senses she would have given up all that nonsense. . . But from all he could gather, she seemed to cling to it more fervently than ever. He couldn't have that sort of thing at Pendre; it would only make his wife restless.

"I'll work when I come back if you care to give me a job at Wingrave's," answered Eustace.

"You know that it's there—waiting for you. But I'm not going to keep it open forever while you wander about the world amusing yourself, and so I tell you. And may I ask what you're going to live on in the meantime?"

It was characteristic of Lord Pendre that he always viewed every matter from its financial aspect.

"My gratuity," answered Eustace laconically. "It'll last me ages. When it's finished I shall come back, like the prodigal son."

There was a whimsical look in his dark eyes.

From across the table Pamela Webb was watching him. She thought: "How handsome he looks to-night." She regarded him with a dull envy. He was consistently polite to her, but he took no more notice of her than was absolutely necessary. She sighed, and wondered if Ernest Soames would be in Llyn to-morrow afternoon—he had said something about it. She would suggest his taking her over to St. David's Bay in the car, if they did meet. It was quite a long run, they would have time for a good talk . . . Ernest seemed to have quite recovered from his disappointment about Vicky; he was only rather annoyed still with Lord Pendre.

She pictured herself entertaining Eustace at Moth Hill Park. . . .

2

Eustace reached Rome about the middle of January. Bleak and chill winds held the place in their grip. A drizzling rain fell, and Rome had the tragically melancholy aspect which most Italian cities present in wet weather.

There was another reason for this melancholy. . . . Armed with an introduction from Father Sheldon, Eustace called upon an eminent Cardinal with a view to gaining admittance to one of the audiences given by the Holy Father, only to learn that the Pope was suffering from a severe cold and that all audiences were temporarily suspended.

It was not until the afternoon of the following day that the news flashed through the city that the Holy Father's illness had become serious. There were alarming symptoms; he had received the Last Sacraments. Rumor was rife, and there were not wanting voices to affirm that death had already supervened. It was a Friday, and no one spoke or thought of anything else. On all sides, in the modest inn where Eustace, mindful of his fast-diminishing gratuity, had taken a cheap room, he heard the matter discussed. Everyone seemed to have some fresh scrap of information to impart. One had a friend living in the Vatican, who had actually interviewed the doctor; another could boast of a cousin in the Noble Guard, who had been on duty all the day before and could speak with perfect accuracy. The little pyramid of information, false and true, slowly augmented, and rumor contradicted rumor with appalling rapidity and verisimilitude.

In the evening, Eustace went down to the great Piazza of St. Peter's and found it crowded with people. The rain had ceased; a few pale stars flickered in the sky, the great wide piazza with its out-thrust colonnades, was filled with the deep blue dusk of twilight. St. Peter's stood there, almost grim in its massive stupendous beauty. The figures upon the roof were etched against the evening sky, and the twilight seemed to imbue them with a hint of life and movement. The center one, that of Our Lord, carried a Cross.

The great fountains were playing, and the cool plash of the falling water made a soft accompaniment to the subdued sounds that emanated from the crowd. The place displayed a strangely animated aspect, as if almost the whole of Rome had gathered there, drawn thither by anxiety, sympathy, curiosity, or a mere desire to ascertain the news for sheer business purposes. But for the most part voices were lowered, and the people showed a seriousness, a solemnity not usually associated with Latin crowds. Many eyes gazed up at the windows of the Pope's apartment. A faint subdued light showed through the chinks of the closed shutters. At the great bronze door the Swiss Guards in their heavy winter cloaks stood denying ingress to all but a favored few. Within —what was happening? Was the frail form of Benedict XV, with its spirit too great for the fragile envelope of flesh, still battling gallantly for life, or was it already sinking upon unconsciousness? To many of those present he was unknown by sight; they knew him only by the photographs that everywhere decorated the shop-windows—a delicate, suffering face with wistful eyes.

A few hawkers of evening papers moved about in the crowd, offering the latest bulletin. Diplomats emerged from the Vatican and were swept away in rapid automobiles. Not only was all Rome waiting expectantly and with breathless anxiety for news, but it seemed as if all the world beyond Rome shared in that tense anticipation.

There had been a slight rally . . . a faint hope was adumbrated. The heart was a little stronger. The Holy Father had spoken a few words, had begged one of the aged cardinals to take some rest . . . Some figures, hopeless of hearing anything that night, detached themselves from the crowd and disappeared into the Borgo.

Eustace waited a little longer. He did not understand much of what was being said so loquaciously around him, although his school-knowledge of Latin helped him a little, enabling him sometimes to catch the gist of it. Then he walked slowly along the Borgo—*Burgus Saxonum*—since here in olden days the Anglo-Saxons possessed a hospice for their many pilgrims, when the ancient basilica of St. Peter's was still standing. He passed the beautiful Renaissance palace, once the property of Henry VIII, in whose Catholic days it served as a residence for the British Ambassador, and within whose walls it was said that Cardinal Wolsey had sojourned. Opposite was Raphael's palace, and in the center of the piazza that opened out between the Borgo Vecchio and the Borgo Nuovo, Pope Paul V's lovely fountain flung up its delicate silver spray. Rome was full of English memories and associations, dating back to those days when loyalty to the Holy See was a passionate sentiment for which men and women lived and died and when England had earned for herself the proud title of the "Dowry of Our Lady." There were Catholic families—all honor to them—who had kept their faith and their lamps burning, even as at Pendre during those penal days that followed, when monasteries were seized and their inmates slain or driven into exile, when churches were desecrated and their priests imprisoned and tortured. And now after more than three centuries there was a steady stream of British converts flowing Rome-ward year by year.

He glanced back at the great Dome, a mass of solid darkness above which the dark blue winter sky was scattered with bright frosty stars.

3

In the morning Eustace returned to St. Peter's at an early hour, and went down into the crypt to hear Mass. Even at that early hour it was very full of worshipers, and he felt that he was seeing the great basilica under an entirely new aspect. The low vaulted ceiling; the deep surrounding dusk spreading far down those narrow cloisters where lay the dust of illustrious popes and kings; the gleaming candles upon the altars; the black silhouettes of the worshipers, made him think of the days when the early Christians were constrained to hear Mass at some subterranean and secret altar, amid the dust of their own dead, in the Roman Catacombs.

As he knelt there experiencing a devotion far more profound than any he had yet felt and which he attributed to the spirit of place, he thought involuntarily of the chapel at Pendre whose lamp had been for so long extinguished.

Pendre—his mother—Vicky—he prayed for them all now. Especially for his mother, for whom he felt a deep and still inexplicable anxiety. He longed, even while he dreaded, to know that secret of hers, so jealously, so scrupulously guarded.

The bell rang. He bowed his head. He was hearing Mass in the very spot where St. Peter must once have stood, close to the place where he suffered his terrible martyrdom. Eustace raised his eyes and saw the strangely shining Host, uplifted for all to see and worship.

When Mass was over he remained there, examining the tombs about him. There was the great white marble tomb of Pope Pius X, who was soon, so rumor affirmed, to be raised to the Altars of the Church. Flowers and wreaths had been strewn upon it, some mere humble little offerings, the gift perhaps of the poor from among whom he had sprung and whom he had so loved all his life. Just beyond was the huge amorphous mass of stone that marked the last resting place of the Stuart kings, father and sons, of whom it had been well said that they "gave three crowns for a Mass." Of what avail would their earthly crowns have been to them now? Long ago their passionate fidelity must have won for them, despite so much of weakness and failure, its due reward in the Kingdom of Heaven. . . .

Three Crowns for a Mass. . . . Eustace could hardly explain why that saying recurred to him now. What he himself stood to lose was trivial and insignificant beside their immense sacrifice of temporal things and worldly honors. Pendre. . . . yes, it might be that he would never be permitted to restore the chapel and re-light the lamp, and kneel once more before the Blessed Sacrament in a place that had been for so long dedicated to the worship of God, to the Faith of His One True Church.

Yet these considerations bore no weight with him now. He had but one wish—to make his abjuration in the crypt of St. Peter's, here in the very heart of Christendom. He had always known subconsciously that this was his motive for coming to Rome. And now the moment was surely approaching. . . .

It must take place here in the crypt, and nowhere else. For here only did he seem to have reached his journey's end.

He climbed the narrow winding stairs back into the basilica, and knelt for a time near the Confession. The golden lamps were burning in a semicircle around it; they looked like shining flowers, in the dusk of the early winter's morning. He thought of St. Peter, the Fisherman, who had been the first to receive the Keys. And then he thought of this latest successor of St. Peter who, yonder within the great palace, was fighting for life while all the world watched and waited in breathless suspense.

All that day rumor was rife in the city, but early on the following morning Eustace knew that Death had entered the great marble palace of the Vatican, and laid his cold hand upon the Holy Father. He had foreseen, so people said, the hour of his death. "Do go and rest," he had said to one of the cardinals, "there is plenty of time between now and six o'clock." At six o'clock the end came, and Benedict XV was gathered to the two hundred and fifty-nine popes who had preceded him in his great Office.

The piazza held a strange attraction for Eustace, it seemed to be the place to which all others converged. He returned thither on the Monday morning—a beautiful day that almost heralded spring with its warm airs and bright sunshine. The fountains flung up their great silver jets of spray touched to gold by the winter sunshine. And it seemed to him almost natural, a thing inevitable given the scene and the circumstances, that he should encounter Nella Tresham close to the huge modern statue of St. Peter.

She was dressed in deep mourning. Her face was pale and composed and had lost something of its vivacity. Her hair struck a note of brilliant color amid her somber garb. In hue, he thought, it almost resembled that of a shining goldfish.

He went eagerly up to her, lifting his hat. She evinced no surprise, but a gleam of pleasure lit up her face.

"Where are you staying?" he inquired.

"I'm staying with Mrs. Dyrham—she's taken an apartment here for the winter," she said. "It's in Via Sistina—near the top of the Spanish steps."

Meeting her thus, he felt that they were old and intimate friends. Of course he could not expect her to share the joy that was passionately invading his whole being. His thoughts traveled with extraordinary celerity. He saw his future mapped out in strong distinct lines. In a few weeks he would be a Catholic—that was already settled, and the Cardinal to whom Father Sheldon had given him an introduction had promised to receive him immediately after the Conclave. And Nella would share that Catholic life of his. She would be his wife. Together they would follow that hard and beautiful road. The strength and purity of her face, to which grief had added a slight austerity, gave him a new courage and confidence.

"I have two tickets for St. Peter's," she said, after a moment. "It's shut to-day, you know. One can only go in with a ticket, because they are going to bring the Holy Father down for the lying-in-state."

"I should like to come. I'd really no hope of getting in," he said.

He longed to tell her then something about himself, of his secret history since their parting, of the story of Vicky's illness and reception into the Church and marriage. But he refrained. Only, it was so difficult to believe that she could not see into his heart and know how securely and immutably her own image was therein enthroned.

At that moment Pendre and Moth Hill and Glen Cottage, and the frozen road that passed through Llyn within earshot of the sea, all seemed incredibly remote. Even the world about them was far away and insubstantial. He was in a dream, scarcely able to realize the joy that was his.

They entered St. Peter's by a side door. Already some thousands of people had gathered there, men, women and children clad for the most part in black or in somber colors, waiting in solemn and respectful silence.

Presently the cortège appeared. The slight small form of the dead pope was carried shoulder-high upon a bier. His head surmounted by a gold miter was raised slightly upon a striped velvet cushion. White and gold striped silk covered his throat and emphasised the rather dark pallor of his sleeping face.

Eustace and Nella stood as near as the papal troops would permit to a purple catafalque which had been placed close to the Confession. The bier was laid upon this, and the procession paused while the *Miserere* and *De Profundis* psalms were sung. The heavy chanting of this funereal music sounded solemnly through the half-darkened basilica. Then the bier was lifted up once more, the procession re-formed, the cortège resumed its journey toward the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

This time it passed quite close to Eustace and Nella, kneeling there on the outskirts of the crowd. They could see the face quite plainly with its marks of brief severe suffering. The mouth sagged open a little at the left corner. The black brows were strongly marked. The heavy lids were closed over the kindly wistful dark eyes.

But those who had seen Pope Benedict XV carried into St. Peter's to the shrill glad music of the silver trumpets on the day of the Canonization of St. Joan of Arc—surely the moment of his greatest and most supreme Pontifical triumph—could not help contrasting it with the simplicity of his last entrance when he came to take his place among the long line of dead popes who were resting in the dim crypt below. . . .

Carried thus into the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, made immortally beautiful by Bernini's tabernacle with its adoring angels, the Holy Father was laid upon a raised catafalque close to the gates, his head toward the altar, his face visible to all who passed. Eighteen tall candles burned around him, their flickering flames causing a movement of lights and shadows to pass wave-like over him. Officers of the Noble Guard stood at each corner of the bier, with a curious unnatural immobility. With his strong yet delicate features, his small patrician hands, the dead Pope looked like a finely-carven figure upon some exquisite Renaissance tomb. . . .

As Eustace gazed upon this man whom he had never seen in life, he made a rapid mental survey of his short and tragic Pontificate. His cry for peace that had always been misjudged and misinterpreted. The War that had so surely killed Pius X in a few weeks, had also hastened his own end. Never perhaps a saint, like his great and beloved predecessor, he had yet been something of a martyr. Frail and austere, he had spoken fearlessly when speech was necessary; he had never swerved from a desire to do all he could to arrest the pitiless massacre of young life in Europe. Tracing the missing, obtaining the release of some prisoners, the pardon of others—these were among the most important operations that he had instituted and organized at the Vatican. But in his efforts to observe absolute neutrality—for he had sheep in all these pastures—he had incurred the abuse of every belligerent country. He received insult and calumny in silence, so much so that it would seem during those terrible years he had scrupulously followed the Divine example summed up briefly in those words: *Jesus autem tacebat.* The silence of Pope Benedict! He had made no reply to his accusers; he had never attempted to justify himself. The lonely little figure in the Vatican had only worked silently and ceaselessly for the one cause of peace. And now "the cleverest head in Europe," as his had been called by a reluctant, unwilling admirer, had finished its task. The frail hands were stilled, and death had wrought in marble the fine, delicate, and patrician features of the man who for more than seven troubled years had worn the Triple Crown and carried the great Keys of the Catholic Church. . . .

4

Nella's eyes were bright with tears as she stood there. Her lips moved. . . . Eustace knew that she was praying. It seemed to him that in this solemn and poignant moment they were being drawn irresistibly nearer to each other.

He glanced at her as they moved on with the surging crowd toward the door. Her beauty seemed to him almost wonderful. And then his heart sank a little. By the very step that would draw them more closely together, they might be forever separated. He was heir to Pendre, to his father's title and wealth—but might that title not prove to be an empty one? Would she be willing to face poverty and effort with him? He felt a boundless ambition stirring within him like a strong young impulse. He would work for her. Surely with such an incentive he would give of his best.

The crowd swept them onward. Soon they were once more outside in the piazza, dimly illuminated by the pale sunshine of this delicate austere January day. The sky was very blue, and the figures of the saints, standing at intervals upon the summit of the colonnades, were etched against it in pale grey silhouette. They looked almost like animated figures, gesticulating to each other, possessing nothing of the Greek calm associated with statues. They seemed indeed to form part of this world of life and energetic movement, where the great fountains flung up their glittering rainbow showers, and the busy piazza gave evidence of warm pulsing life. . . . the life of Italy . . . . her spiritual resurrection after the War, that was to make of her once more a great nation. . . .

"I'll take you home," said Eustace. He hailed a taxi, and they drove down to the Tiber. Looking back, the Dome was bluish grey, and the Figure of the Redeemer bearing His Cross stood out sharply, with the Apostles and St. John the Baptist grouped on either side of Him. And in that limpid and translucent atmosphere these figures too seemed to possess life and movement, almost as if they were holding some mystical colloquy.

"And after the funeral there'll be a Conclave," said Nella, "I wonder who the next Pope will be. People talk of the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan—one of the greatest scholars in the Church. But you know the saying—he who goes into the conclave Pope comes out a Cardinal."

They reached the door of the house in Via Sistina where Mrs. Dyrham was living.

"I shall see you again?" he said. "I must see you again."

"Oh yes—whenever you like. I'm sure Mrs. Dyrham will be delighted."

"And Mrs. Welby?"

"Oh, she's here too, but she didn't come with me to-day because she had a cold. Wasn't it kind of Mrs. Dyrham to invite us both? But then Mrs. Welby speaks Italian, and that's very useful."

She put her hand in his for a second and then entered the lift, that was at the far end of the hall. When she had vanished, he walked slowly away and went down the Spanish Steps back to the hotel, scarcely able even now to believe in the reality of the scene. But finding Nella in this way seemed in a sense to complete the Roman picture for him, joining as it were the two broken ends of his life, bringing Rome and Pendre into juxtaposition. Making of them in despite of all things, a harmonious whole.

Her face haunted him now—the small beautiful oval with its perfect coloring as of a wild rose petal—the complexion that is only found with brightly-colored hair, the dark blue eyes with grey shadows in them. Such a look of quiet strength and poise—such a lovable, *trustable* face.

He felt the warm life of the city about him, its spiritual life that made such a wonderful background to all its modern activities. Rome could never decay as Athens had done; she could never die; she was a vast palimpsest upon which successive civilization had written their indelible records. Christianity kept her alive and sentient and progressive; whatever happened to her in other and temporal ways, she must always remain the heart of Christendom. Sometimes in the past her pulse had grown feeble; it seemed almost as if she had fallen upon irreparable ruin, because of the deep wounds to her civic life, the storming and sacking and destruction of her ancient monuments by lawless armies. But always the spiritual life within her had triumphed; she was still the first of cities, and it was Catholicism that made her so.

And looking down upon her from the top of the Spanish Steps, it seemed to Eustace that she was fair beyond all dreams. . . .

Soon after his return to the hotel, he received a telephone message from Mrs. Dyrham, inviting him to dine with her that night. Eustace accepted, the prospect of seeing Nella again so soon was too tempting to be refused. But he felt if it was Mrs. Dyrham's intention deliberately to "encourage" him that she was acting under a false belief. She might be picturing him as a man of great future wealth and importance whom it would be well for Nella to marry. Perhaps she had heard something from Mrs. Welby of his evident interest in

Nella, and was determined to do all that she could to help the matter on.

His own future indeed now seemed to him so appallingly uncertain that he wondered whether he would ever have the courage to ask Nella to marry him. Directly the news that he was a Catholic reached his father's ears—and he was determined to tell him immediately after the ceremony had taken place—he knew that he could look for no further help from him. The gates of Wingrave's works would be automatically closed to him, and Gerard Hammond's younger brother would certainly receive the coveted vacant post. It wasn't that he wanted money—he told himself now—but he did want work that would bring him in enough to live upon. And that, at the present moment, was not easy to find.

He arrived at Mrs. Dyrham's sumptuous apartment at eight o'clock. It was not a large party. Besides Mrs. Dyrham, Mrs. Welby and Nella, there were only present a young diplomat and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Craven, and Monsignor Fane, an English priest who had lived for many years in Rome and was extremely well known both in "Black" society and at the Vatican (where he had been indeed domestic prelate both to the dead Pope and his predecessor). He was a man of some sixty odd years, tall, with smooth dark hair slightly silvered with grey, very dark eyes, and a polished courtly manner. He seemed extremely interested in Eustace, and after dinner engaged him in conversation in rather a particular way.

Eustace thought little of this, probably the Monsignor was a friend of Nella's, and was submitting him to a certain scrutiny.

Nor did this astonish him. Catholics were necessarily very careful when any question of marriage arose, and his slight attentions to Nella might already have been construed into a serious matrimonial purpose. The difference in their faith—for as yet no one present was aware of his resolve to be received into the Church almost immediately—might render it necessary for especial precautions to be taken. Even if Mrs. Dyrham regarded the matter from a merely worldly point of view, and thought it would be an excellent thing for Nella to marry Lord Pendre's only son and heir, Mrs. Welby would scarcely be satisfied with these temporal advantages for the girl to whom she stood now almost in the relation of a mother.

Monsignor Fane's motive for taking him apart in this way after dinner might have been based upon some hint from Mrs. Welby, but Eustace could not but believe that there was yet another reason for his thus singling him out. And it was revealed at last when he said suddenly:

"By the way, was your father Mr. Hugo Wingrave?"

"Yes," answered Eustace.

Aware that he was being secretly inspected, Eustace was nevertheless charmed with the Roman prelate, whose courtly manners and fine ascetic aquiline face attracted him immediately. But this question startled him, and he flushed slightly beneath the dark penetrating gaze. He felt uneasy. It was absurd of course. What could Monsignor Fane possibly know of his father? He did not think his parents had ever been in Rome since their original meeting there, shortly before their marriage.

"Then you mother was Miss Giselda Kelsey?"

"Yes . . ."

There was a stern, cold look now in the priest's eyes. Seeing it, Eustace's heart sank like a stone.

"Did you—did you know her?" he asked.

Beneath the overhanging brows his eyes burned with a somber fire.

"A great many years ago. Before her marriage," replied Monsignor Fane.

Eustace felt that he was enveloped once more in the cold dark shadow that for so long had hung over Pendre. It had followed him, but now it seemed to be actual, tangible, a thing that chilled him and brought a cold sweat to his brow.

He was just going to ask the priest some more questions, when Monsignor Fane rose and went across the room to speak to Mrs. Craven.

The salotto was immense, with a high and vaulted roof that made it unusually lofty. Great porphyry pillars divided off part of it and in this smaller portion there was an open grate, where an immense fire of olive logs was burning. Even without this the radiators made the room comfortably warm. The walls were hung with delicate old tapestries, and there were console tables of purple-colored marble with gilt supports heavily-carved, and wonderful mirrors above them. Curtains of old rose damask screened the windows, and the only things that struck a modern note were some comfortable sofas and large easy chairs, and the books and flowers with which Mrs. Dyrham loved to surround herself.

Nella was sitting near her. But, seeing Eustace left alone rather abruptly in this way, she rose and went across the room to talk to him.

"It was good of you to come at such short notice, but you see we'd only just found out you were in Rome."

"But I think it most awfully kind of Mrs. Dyrham to ask me. Do you know Monsignor Fane well?"

"No, I'd never seen him before we arrived here in November, but he has been very kind since we came, getting us an audience and all that. He gave me those tickets too for St. Peter's this morning. You see, he used to know my mother many years ago, and they always corresponded. I like him, don't you?"

"Yes," said Eustace, "but I'm not sure that he likes me. He left me so suddenly just now when I told him who my mother was."

That abrupt action had wounded him. And it did not somehow seem in harmony with the priest's almost diplomatic manner. He felt that in some way he must have made a disagreeable disclosure to him. What was there—what could there be—against his mother? Why had he felt so sensible of the shadow then that it seemed almost as if it had touched him like a dark cold curtain? . . . He shivered.

"Oh, you mustn't think that. We told him you were coming, and he said he should be so interested to meet you—he'd known people of the name of Wingrave many years ago."

Eustace looked slightly relieved, and yet the fear was still there.

"Perhaps it was my imagination," he said slowly.

He tried to comfort himself with this thought.

All of a sudden he felt that things were not going to be easy between himself and Nella. Even when he was a Catholic, and could ask her to be his wife. And as he looked across the room to where Monsignor Fane was sitting he wondered if he really knew of anything to his detriment—anything that might intervene between himself and Nella.

"Let me come and fetch you to-morrow morning," he said to her. "We might do some sight-seeing together. I hardly know my way about yet."

"I'll ask Mrs. Dyrham. She may want me to go out with her."

But Mrs. Dyrham had no objection to offer; indeed she was secretly delighted, and said to Eustace in her pleasant bass voice:

"It's been charming to find you here, Mr. Wingrave. You must come and see us whenever you like."

Eustace thanked her, made some excuse and departed. He felt that he could not remain there any longer; the presence of Monsignor Fane disturbed him. But when he had gone Mrs. Craven observed: "What a handsome boy! Of course the elder son was killed—I hear his parents have never got over it. I know the sister, Mrs. Hammond, quite well."

"They are neighbors of mine down in Wales," said Mrs. Dyrham. "Lord Pendre has a beautiful property there. But I know them very slightly. They bought the Chittendens' old place when it came into the market about a dozen years ago."

"New men and old acres—it's the same everywhere," languidly observed Mr. Carven, a very fair blasé-looking young man who was considered quite abnormally clever.

"Yes, and these were Catholic acres," remarked Monsignor Fane. "One is always sorry to hear of a chapel being dismantled."

"Nella and I used to think that this young man had leanings," said Mrs. Welby; "he was often seen at Mass in the little church at Llyn. I rather wondered at it myself—his father's so dreadfully prejudiced."

"Really? I didn't know there were any people like that left alive," was Mr. Craven's comment. "Everyone seems so monotonously tolerant in these days."

"Mr. Wingrave's sister—Mrs. Martin Sedgwick—has become a Catholic—she was received quite lately. She was very ill, they thought she was going to die, and Martin Sedgwick insisted upon marrying her—it was quite a romance—" said Mrs. Craven, who had heard the story from Barbara.

"Lord Pendre can't have liked that," said Mrs. Welby.

"It would be a wonderful thing," said Nella, speaking for the first time, "if Mr. Wingrave became a Catholic and inherited Pendre, and had a chapel there again." Her blue eyes shone. She was thinking of Eustace as she had seen him in St. Peter's that day, kneeling reverently as the body of the dead Pope was borne past him.

"I should think that would be extremely unlikely," said Monsignor Fane dryly.

"Lord Pendre is quite capable of cutting him off with a shilling if he does become a Catholic," said Mrs. Craven.

"My dear—he couldn't possibly do anything so old-fashioned. No one could," remonstrated her husband.

Monsignor Fane looked at him attentively.

"I am afraid prejudice against the Church is more common than you suppose. Every year quite a number of wills are published in which it distinctly says that any person who is a Roman Catholic or becomes one is to forfeit all the money that may be bequeathed to them."

Mr. Carven still looked unconvinced and remarked.

"I really thought that kind of thing was as extinct as the dodo!"

CHAPTER XX

"Habemus Papam"

1

ALL the morning a dove had flown restlessly above the pointed roof of the Sistine Chapel, whose brown brick wall joined St. Peter's to the Vatican Palace. A small chimney placed at a slightly crooked angle showed darkly against the space of brown brick, its top thrust against the sky. Thousands of eyes in the great teeming Piazza below were fastened upon that chimney, from which the *sfumata* was presently destined to appear.

Overhead the sky was of a pure blue and the dove's wings made a sudden flash of silver against it as it flew and circled above the roof. To many it was emblematic, a symbol of that Holy Spirit Who had once been seen by mortal eyes in the semblance of a dove, and Who was now guiding the cardinals assembled in conclave to a right choice.

The wide piazza with its immense twin colonnades, its glancing fountains, its great obelisk within whose summit a fragment of the True Cross was enclosed, was filled from end to end with a crowd of expectant persons of all nations, races, and languages.

What was going on within those marble walls? Rumor was rife, as it always is in Rome, but only one thing was certain—that nothing of what was passing there could be known. The Vatican was too closely guarded for any chance intelligence to escape.

A little after noon a puff of dark smoke shot up from the chimney and presently vanished in the blue sky above. An audible murmur of disappointment went up from the vast crowd. No decision this morning. The throng of people vanished, even as the smoke had evaporated,—automobiles, taxis, trams and carriages swept them from the scene. In less than a quarter of an hour the Piazza was emptied.

For four days the same scene was enacted. Sunday came, a brilliant day of blue skies, warm sunshine, and soft airs—a May morning in February. The piazza in the afternoon had almost the aspect of a fair such as is held on many great festas in Italy. Whole families encamped there for the day, fathers, mothers, children, babies-in-arms. Great clusters of balloon balls that looked like mammoth bunches of multi-colored grapes, made patches of kaleidoscopic hue amid the surging throng. Surely to-day—a day so propitious for an august event such as the election of a new Pope—the cardinals in conclave would arrive at some decision. After hours of waiting, the smoke suddenly ascended, perversely black in hue; it lingered a little longer than usual before it evaporated into the blue ether. Once more the disappointed crowds returned home. Many of the Roman workmen and artisans would be unable to return on the morrow. And mingled with their disappointment there was a little fear. Long delay in the election of a Pope was of ill-omen, signifying Divine displeasure.

Each day Eustace met Nella Tresham close to the great statue of St. Peter at the foot of the steps. It was there that they had agreed to wait for each other. Mrs. Dyrham was sitting somewhere in her car, and Mrs. Welby was with her. They preferred to watch in comfort instead of standing about or sitting upon newspapers on the stone steps, with the almost inevitable certainty of catching cold. But Nella was free to wander wherever she would, and if she wandered in the company of young Wingrave so much the better, from Mrs. Dyrham's point of view.

The young man was evidently "taken" with Nella. And it would be a splendid thing for the girl. She was very pretty and almost penniless and she would be very lucky to "catch" young Wingrave. Mrs. Dyrham was inclined to Mr. Craven's opinion, that in these days fathers couldn't really be so old-fashioned and prejudiced and ridiculous as to cut their only sons off with a shilling or any other paltry sum just because they had become Catholics.

She was devoted to Nella, and longed to see her happily and prosperously married. She even thought she might give her a little *dot* out of her own superfluous wealth. Just to supplement her tiny income. And she liked the look of young Wingrave—he had such nice eyes! . . . She could understand any girl falling in love with him, even if he hadn't been heir to a title, a handsome property, and great wealth.

Monday morning dawned grey and hopelessly wet. Nella appeared in Mrs. Welby's room wearing a black cloth coat and a small black hat which did its best to conceal the pretty "goldfish" curls.

"Oh, you're not going to walk in this weather? You'd much better wait and go with us in the car," Mrs. Welby expostulated.

"No, darling—I'm going with Mr. Wingrave. Why, it might be to-day, and you always get down there so late! And then he's just telephoned to say he'll fetch me in a taxi, as the weather's so bad."

"I wonder," observed Mrs. Welby, "whether it's quite wise for you to see so much of Mr. Wingrave!"

Nella sat down on the sofa and regarded her with humorous expression in her dancing blue eyes.

"You dear old prude—you ought to have lived in the golden days of Queen Victoria!"

"Well, I did," confessed Mrs. Welby; "I know it sounds antediluvian to you young things, but it wasn't really so bad as you think. We had our pleasures."

"I'm sure you had. You ate and drank, and were married and given in marriage and all the rest of it. . . . I must be going down. I feel somehow as if the *sfumata* would be white to-day!"

She danced toward the door.

"Nella—do be serious. I'm certain they'll never let their son marry a Catholic."

"But if he's one himself?"

"Only, he isn't."

"I'm sure, though, he's going to be. If he wants to be he will, and if he wants to marry me—" She stopped abruptly, the sentence was leading her into awkward unsuspected paths.

Mrs. Welby lifted her dark brows.

"You mean he'll do that too?" she inquired ironically.

"Well, we're not thinking of marriage just yet, so don't let that disturb you."

"He is falling in love with you, though. I don't like to accuse you of encouraging him, but—"

"Of course I'm encouraging him! I think it would be rather nice to have him just the least little bit in love with me! No one ever has been, you know, although you did get silly and nonsensical ideas into your head once about Ernest Soames! I can prove you in the wrong there, for he proposed to Vicky Wingrave last summer, and Lord Pendre tried to force her to marry him! So there!"

"Well, don't let yourself fall in love with Mr. Wingrave, for I'm sure they'll never let him marry you!"

Nella came a little nearer; her face was all aglow, and her blue eyes were shining like sapphires.

"Why shouldn't I let myself fall in love with him? Why that would be the most thrilling thing of all!"

Mrs. Welby was a trifle old-fashioned. People fell in love—she had only succeeded in doing so very moderately herself—became engaged with the approval and sanction of their respective parents, and finally after an interval were married. But to fall in love with a man whose parents were bound to oppose the marriage, surely spelt disaster. In her opinion Nella was doing a very foolish thing in being seen so constantly alone in the company of young Wingrave, and she could not understand why Mrs. Dyrham should encourage it in the way she did.

Eustace was something of a puzzle to her. When she was with him she was conscious of his hidden strength and obstinacy. His present mode of life too was rather ambiguous. Here he was alone in Rome, living austerely rather than extravagantly, more like a poor man's son than the only son of a very rich man, and she had come to the conclusion that he had probably already quarreled with his father about his resolve to become a Catholic. He seemed to know no one, to go to no parties. There were certain houses in Rome where the much diminished British Colony did still meet and foregather, and it would have been a very simple matter for a young man in his position to obtain an introduction to them. But Eustace was never seen at any of them. He liked to loaf about with Nella, and Mrs. Welby was beginning to think that they were neither of them spending their time quite profitably.

Nella bent down and kissed her.

"You mustn't tell anyone, but now I come to consider it I'm not sure that I'm not just the least little bit in love with him! He is such a dear, isn't he? I keep on thinking how much Mother would have liked him! I must be a perfect fool, because I really believe it began that first time on Moth Hill. I know I liked his eyes, and that queer smile he gave. And that wonderful little sister of his with her stormy, passionate face, looking like a naughty child who's just been punished. I thought them both frightfully attractive! I wanted to take Vicky in my arms there and then, and kiss and comfort her! I'm so glad she's married and to that nice Martin Sedgwick we used to see driving out with her and Lady Pendre."

With this confession Nella went out of the room. She ran down three flights of marble stairs, and in the hall below encountered Eustace.

"I say—you're sure it's not too wet?"

She made a charming little grimace.

"You're as bad as Mrs. Welby. Do you think I'm made of sugar?"

"Somehow I feel it'll be to-day."

"I've felt that every day."

2

Outside, the taxi was waiting; they both got in and drove off to the piazza. Already an immense crowd had assembled there, despite the pouring rain. The place looked black, with the sea of umbrellas.

Above the Sistine chapel the dove was still flying; its white wings flashing against the grey sky.

The fountains were playing vigorously, and the wind drove the spray across the piazza. They seemed to add to the melancholy of the scene, to emphasise the steadily falling rain.

At twenty minutes to twelve a puff of smoke issued from the fateful chimney. This time it was white, filmy, coming and going like a little cloud. It ascended straight into the grey wet atmosphere and vanished abruptly. A thrill ran through the crowd, like an electric current. There was a cry of *È fatto il Papa! È fatto il Papa!* . . .

One after the other the names of cardinals who were *papabile* were suggested. The wildest rumors were afloat. Suddenly Eustace and Nella saw Monsignor Fane advancing toward them. His face wore a look of strange excitement, almost of emotion.

"It's Cardinal Ratti," he said. "And they say he's coming out!"

His eyes were aglow. It was as if a burden of suspense too heavy to be borne had suddenly been removed.

Cardinal Ratti—in a few minutes the name had passed from mouth to mouth; not a soul in the crowd but had heard it. Already the telephones were at work, messengers were being despatched in all directions, in cars and on motorcycles. A few minutes more and the news would be flashed to the uttermost ends of the earth. . . .

But the majority of those present were occupied with the possibility of seeing the new Pope. Would he come out? It was said that his first public act would be to stand upon the loggia and bless the assembled multitude. No Holy Father had been seen in public since the happenings of 1870. There were old men and women present who could recall the last appearance of Pius IX on that loggia.

The central window of the Hall of Benediction was opened, amid the delirious cries of the crowd. The usual formula was observed. A white carpet, with a red border and with the

Papal Arms finely woven upon the center, was flung over the stone balcony. A procession headed by a priest carrying a great gold cross detached itself from the inner gloom. Then a Cardinal came forward, and across the death-like hush that prevailed in the piazza his words *Habemus Papam* sounded clear and audible. Then the name, Achille Ratti, Cardinal Archbishop of Milan—a name familiar to many of those present, since at one time the great scholar Monsignor Ratti had been the chief librarian at the Vatican. Then the announcement that he had taken the name of Pius XI was received with a fresh outburst of frenzied enthusiasm and joy.

Still the rain poured pitilessly upon the thronging crowds. But it fell unheeded. The tense, expectant excitement increased, and was even greater than when the *sfumata* had announced that the scrutiny had at last been crowned with success. Twenty minutes passed. Soldiers were seen entering the basilica—clearing it of all who had remained there thinking that the blessing would as usual be given within. The great gates clashed to. This signified beyond a doubt that the Blessing of the new Pope would be given from the loggia for the first time for more than fifty years.

At last amid cries and shouts of joy the Holy Father appeared, wearing the white papal soutane and cape of crimson velvet with ermine border. This one, just raised to the most august office in the world, and upon whom the dread gift of infallibility had fallen, advanced to the front of the balcony and held out both his arms with a magnificent sweeping gesture as if he would fain have taken to his heart not only the dense thronging multitude that greeted him now, but all Italy, and the whole world that lay beyond Italy, for were not the sheep of his pasture to be found in the remotest corners of the earth?

There was not a dry eye in the whole piazza. Many people sobbed. Cries of *Evviva il Papa!* resounded, flung from thousands of throats. A wave of the hand from the Cardinal imposed silence. A book was held up in front of the Holy Father. He intoned the prayers in a strong and clear voice, audible to all.

> Sancti Apostoli Petrus et Paulus de quorum potestate et auctoritate confidimus, ipsi intercedant pro nobis ad Dominum.
>
> Precibus et meritis Beatæ Mariæ semper Virginis, beati Michaelis Archangeli, Beati Joannis Baptistæ, et Sanctorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli et omnium Sanctorum,
>
> Misereatur vestri omnipotens Deus et dimissis peccatis vestris perducat vos Jesus Christus ad vitam æternam.
>
> Indulgentiam, absolutionem et remissionem omnium peccatorum vestrorum, spatium veræ et fructuosæ pœnitentitiæ, cor semper pœnitens et emendationem vitæ, gratiam et consolationem Sancti Spiritus et finalem perseverantiam in bonis operibus, tribuat vobis omnipotens et misericors Dominus,
>
> Et benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper . . .

Amen. . . . At the end of each prayer the response rose, a perfect tumult of sound, full of a fierce and passionate fervor. The people knelt down in pools of water to receive that unique and august blessing and absolution. And again in that significant gesture as the uplifted hand made the sign of the Cross upon that kneeling, praying multitude, it was noticed that there was something wide and all-embracing and majestic. *Fides intrepida* . . . . many who were present recalled that in ancient prophecy this name had been bestowed upon the new Pontiff.

The hand was raised in renewed blessing. It was almost as if the Holy Father were reluctant to turn away. . . .

It was not until the Pope had vanished, amid sounding shouts of *"Evviva il Papa! Evviva il Papa!"* that Eustace seemed to remember Nella's presence. All this time, even while kneeling by her side to receive the blessing, he had not consciously thought of her. Now he turned to her and saw that she was unusually pale, and that the tears were quivering on her long lashes.

"Shall we go now?" he said.

A chilly wind had arisen, flinging the spray from the fountains across the piazza. He felt that the scene in which they had just participated had created a new and strange intimacy between them.

Nella had been thinking of Eustace, praying for Eustace. She exclaimed impulsively: "Don't you see how wonderful it is? You mustn't remain outside!"

She looked at him as she spoke. Surely he must have felt some emotion, some sense of fervor and loyalty.

"I've been wanting to tell you," he answered, "I'm to be received in a few days. I was only waiting until the Conclave was over. I've been under instruction for several months."

They drove away in silence. As they crossed the bridge of Sant' Angelo they could see the river, brown and turbulent and swollen with the recent rains, pouring under the arches. Beyond, the Janiculum was faintly green where the spring grass was beginning to shoot up. The grey sky had broken a little, displaying pools of cold pure blue.

The words of the Blessing still echoed in Eustace' ears. He thought he could never forget that scene in any of its details —the grey beating rain, the thronging fervent crowd, and then the white clad figure standing there raising his right arm in blessing while his voice intoned the words clearly and audibly. Pius XI, upon whom the threefold charge first bestowed upon St. Peter had now fallen, the wearer of the Triple Crown, the Keeper of the Keys, the Successor of the Galilean Fisherman. . . .

3

When Eustace told Nella of his forthcoming reception into the Church she said nothing; a lump rose in her throat, and she knew that no words of hers could ever express her joy. She had hoped for it ever since she had first seen him kneeling at Mass in the church at Llyn. Her mother had prayed for it. She had really never doubted the issue; she was only perhaps surprised to hear that it was already settled, that he had taken all the needful preliminary steps.

He drove with her to Via Sistina, leaving her there, and refusing to come in, although the porter informed them that Mrs. Dyrham had already returned.

"May I fetch you for a walk this afternoon?" he asked, almost timidly. "We might go on the Pincio . . . ."

His dark eyes held something of entreaty. Forgetful of the wise and prudent advice of Mrs. Welby Nella answered, "Yes—that'll be very nice. Come about three, and you might come back to tea with us? I'm sure Mrs. Dyrham would be delighted."

Did she too feel that that walk might prove an eventful one for them both? She seemed so unconscious of his love! He walked away moodily. Why should she consent to marry him? She knew him so little. With him love had been a spontaneous thing, springing up in his heart at their first meeting. But he could not be such a coxcomb as to suppose that she could in any way have responded.

Mrs. Dyrham had no objections to offer to the proposed expedition. On the whole, she was pleased to think that the affair was shaping so promisingly. Young people in these days liked to be left alone to amuse each other. Besides, she had Mrs. Welby to fall back upon for companionship.

"And of course bring him back to tea," she added, "we may be a little late, as I'm going to drive along the Via Appia."

The afternoon was not propitious. Rain fell from time to time, and a chilly wind was blowing. They walked briskly up the hill to the Pincio and then across the Borghese Gardens to the Valle Giulia, with its great neo-classic buildings, its beautiful ancient Villa where once Pope Julius III had sojourned.

"Let's go into the Museum—I've never seen it," said Eustace.

"Oh, you ought to see the Etruscan Apollo with its weird terrifying eyes," answered Nella.

The strange terra-cotta figure of the Apollo fashioned in the fifth or sixth century B. C. was duly examined; they lingered in front of it, half hypnotized and half fascinated by its recondite beauty, the prominent fierce eyes, the enigmatic smile, the long snake-like tresses of hair that gave it an almost Medusa-like aspect. They passed through rooms filled with endless Etruscan vases of marvelously new beauty, the colors upon them fresh and glowing as if painted yesterday. Then presently they turned back, away from this harvest of ancient burial places, and went out into the exquisite Renaissance garden, where in sunny spots a few snowdrops and narcissi were visible. It was quite deserted, and they wandered through the enclosed spaces guarded by high white walls that in summer were féstooned with roses.

The gurgle of falling water—such a characteristic sound in Roman gardens, that are incomplete without a fountain—the pale illumination of the winter sunlight, the dark foliage of palm and ilex, the neat box borders and hedges, the white gleaming statues, combined to make the scene a novel and delicious one to them both. They rested at last upon some brick steps behind a screen of feathery bamboos. And suddenly it seemed quite natural to Eustace to turn to her and say:

"I love you, Nella. Will you marry me?" The look in his eyes was pleading, almost wistful. "I'm afraid I shan't have much to offer you when I'm a Catholic."

She smiled at him. "Of course I'll marry you," she said. "I shouldn't care if you hadn't a farthing in the world!"

There was a joyous look in her eyes, just as if his words had informed her with something of the almost terrifying happiness he himself was experiencing. Perhaps, after all, she had known, ever since their meeting on Moth Hill, that some day this would happen. Only, they could neither of them have pictured it as happening here in this wonderful old pleasaunce that had belonged to a Pope nearly four hundred years ago.

But perhaps, too, she had been waiting for him to speak, knowing that he must tell her soon that he loved her.

He put out his hand and took hers, holding it. The touch thrilled her. It was more wonderful even than she had supposed, to be loved by Eustace Wingrave.

"Do you remember that day on Moth Hill? It was nearly a year ago. I was with Vicky. . ."

"But of course I do! I thought you were both the most wonderful people I'd seen. And I did envy you so—for having each other."

"I've loved you always, from that day," Eustace said doggedly. The words threatened to choke him. He wanted to cry for joy.

"I'm so glad. Because it began then with me too."

They sat there for a little in silence, feeling eager and young and simple again, with no tantalizing secret between them. Nothing now to draw them apart, separate them. They could look each other frankly in the eyes. Love created its own simple intimacy. They had the feeling now that they had always in some sense belonged to one another.

"Darling . . . darling . . ." murmured Eustace.

Beneath his dark penthouse brows the eyes were glimmering like subdued lamps.

And Nella was thinking: "I must tell Mrs. Welby how fearfully thrilling it is to have him in love with me." She looked at him proudly. Such a young upright vigorous figure, such a young eager handsome face, full of fire and poetry and intelligence. There was nothing about him that she felt she could ever wish to change. He was strangely perfect.

"But I feel," she said suddenly, "that you ought to marry a girl with heaps and heaps of money. Not a pauper like myself."

"I hate money!" he protested briefly. "And anyhow I can work—we shan't starve. I should like to have had more to give you, though."

A vision of Pendre, lying in its own beautiful woods, overlooking the blue line of the Irish Sea, rose up before him then, and it made his heart ache as never before. For he wanted, more than ever now, to have a Catholic chapel there again, with the lamp burning night and day before the Blessed Sacrament. The light that would cause the shadow on the house to melt away and never darken the old walls again—that nameless, enigmatic, malevolent shadow that had taken something of joy from his own youth and Vicky's. Would Pendre ever be his? Would his father ever forgive him for becoming a Catholic, for marrying a Catholic? Lord Pendre had never cared for him enough to pardon him for such transgressions as those. Perhaps he would leave it all to Barabra and her boy. Philip and Barbara—those were the two who had grown up in apparent oblivion of the shadow, and upon whom all his love had been lavishly spent. They had enjoyed the material and temporal gifts that life had offered them, and whatever Philip might have felt during those last years of war, Barbara at least had assuredly never been assailed by any spiritual cravings and desires. She was frankly happy; she had everything she wanted, an adoring husband, a handsome little son, money, beautiful clothes and jewels, luxurious motor-cars. She despised Eustace and Vicky for not being perfectly contented with the things that so amply satisfied her own needs.

"You see, I only wanted to have Pendre in the future because of having a chapel there, just as there used to be," he explained simply. "And wherever we are we might get permission to have one if we stripped life of all its horrible superfluities and possessions."

She laughed. "You've got the Franciscan spirit!"

"I hate possessions. They rob you of light and air and peace. One *needs* space and freedom."

She smiled at him in her grave wise way.

"You could never have been anything but a Catholic. It couldn't have passed you by."

"But it might so easily. . . When I first came home I told my mother I wanted to find out more about God—about Our Blessed Lord. You see, we'd been brought up practically without religion. But I suppose even then I was thinking subconsciously of the Catholic Church."

He told her the little history of the crucifix he always wore.

"But aren't there any Catholics in your family? Among your ancestors?"

"None that I know of. But Nella—" he stopped, realizing suddenly with almost a shock how little she knew of him, his life, and its innumerable problems, complications and preoccupations. "I've thought sometimes," he proceeded more cautiously, "that my mother knows a good deal about it. . ."

Having broken the ice, he told her of the almost complete absence of religion in his own childhood, of his mother's impenetrable inexplicable silence on the subject, and of how sometimes in approaching her he had felt the shadow about them deepen till he seemed almost to lose himself in a sea of darkness.

Nella, like most very young girls with a love of pretty things and a severely restricted dress-allowance, had often desired to possess money—lots of it—it had been hateful not being able always to buy everything her darling mother had needed—she had longed too for just a touch of comfort and luxury in her home. But now she felt that with all its rigor of poverty, its compulsory austerity, its lack of soft-living, her childhood had yet never been starved as Eustace' had been. It had been filled to the brim with spiritual wealth and ideals. Her mother had taught her to pray as soon as she could speak; and at five years old she was so advanced in spiritual knowledge that she had been permitted to avail herself of Pius X's then recent decree that little children as soon as they could understand Whom they were receiving, should be admitted to the mysteries of Holy Communion. She could therefore hardly remember the time when this had not been the central act of her daily life, but she had never so profoundly envisaged its spiritual importance till she heard Eustace speak thus of his own starved and arid childhood.

"Do you think your mother will mind your becoming a Catholic?" she asked.

"I'm quite sure she won't. She seemed *glad* about Vicky," he answered.

Nella's fingers tightened about his own. A great fear came over her.

"But you don't think she was ever one herself, do you, Eustace?"

"I can't tell you." The suggestion was by no means new to him, and yet to hear it put thus frankly into words made him shudder as if with a sudden sense of chill.

He loved his mother with a tender, reverent, worshiping love; he set her very high; she seemed to him but little lower than the saints. To think of her therefore as a soul astray and wandering stabbed him to the heart.

"Perhaps you could find out. She may tell you now—"

His face was white and agitated. "Oh, but can't you see? If she's an apostate I'd rather not know. It would be too fearful. . ."

She said gently: "Our Lord's often most awfully kind and generous to converts, as if He wanted to make their first steps easy, until they're more capable of bearing big trials for Him. So perhaps—if your first prayers as a Catholic were for her—"

"But you don't know her—she's a saint—she couldn't have done anything to cut herself adrift!" he expostulated, almost with passion. "There couldn't have been anything."

Even to put such a possibility into words was more than he could bear, it wounded alike his love and loyalty.

"It might have been just marrying a man who refused to let her practise her religion or bring her children up as Catholics," said Nella, calm and clear-sighted.

It might have been that certainly, though he was loth to admit it. His mother—with all her perfection of soul, her loveliness of face! And yet this hypothesis that she had once been a Catholic would certainly explain much that was ambiguous in her. And above all things it would explain the shadow that brooded so darkly, so immutably, over Pendre. With a pang of mingled fear and dismay he recalled Vicky's words: *"I feel as if God were against us. What can we have done to offend Him? What can any of us have done? . . ."*

He clung to Nella's hand; he wanted, as a child wants, some warm and reassuring human contact in the face of these nebulous, intangible, yet soul-shaking fears.

"You see, from all you tell me, I feel there must have been —something," said Nella gently.

They were quite alone. He moved a little closer to her and put his arms about her. They kissed each other. Afterward it always seemed to him as if there had been more terror than joy in that first kiss; they were both sitting, enveloped in the shadow. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

Light on the Shadow

1

THEY agreed that no one should be told of the engagement until Eustace had been received into the Church. This quiet little ceremony took place a few days later at an early hour in the crypt of St. Peter's, at an altar not far from the tomb of Pius X. A young Italian friend of the Cardinal's acted as sponsor, and Nella was the only other person present.

Eustace subsequently made his First Communion, kneeling side by side with Nella. From beginning to end the ceremony was touching in its complete simplicity.

On her return to Via Sistina that morning Nella lost no time in informing Mrs. Welby of her engagement. They had lived together for so many years that their relationship was necessarily a very intimate one. Indeed, since Mrs. Tresham's death, Mrs. Welby had almost assumed a kind of guardianship over the girl, and it was therefore due to her that she should hear the news as soon as possible.

She had been expecting some communication of the kind. The young people had spent long days together, sight-seeing in various parts of Rome, and motoring about the Campagna. Nella was obviously enjoying herself very much indeed; she looked better and brighter than she had done since her mother's death. Her interest in young Wingrave was evidently deepening rapidly, perhaps into a sentiment at once more profound and more enduring.

But Mrs. Welby knew very little of the young man, and the affair was beginning to cause her a certain anxiety. Like all the young folk of the present day Nella was wilful, and as there was no one who could legitimately control her, she was placed in a position where she could do practically as she pleased. Moreover, she possessed, as she knew, the whole-hearted support of Mrs. Dyrham in the present matter.

And now Nella had come, all rosy and glowing, from an early expedition to hear Mass in the crypt of St. Peter's, to inform her that she was engaged to Eustace Wingrave—they had been already engaged for more than a week—and she was feeling happier than she had believed it possible to be.

There was really nothing to do but to kiss and congratulate her, and express hopes for her continued happiness. Then Mrs. Dyrham came in and had to be told. She kissed Nella, and said in her bass voice:

"Well, my dear child, I'm very glad indeed you've pulled it off. I think you're a lucky little girl!"

But Mrs. Welby had arrived at those mature, unenthusiastic years when she was able to take no one on trust. Not even Eustace, much as she liked him. There was a superficial charm about him which attracted her, and made her understand perfectly why Nella should have so readily acceded to his desire for an immediate engagement. His prospects were not very bright, for though he was heir to his father's title there was every likelihood of his being disinherited on account of his change of faith.

Nella was very much in love, not sentimentally but with a deep sober earnestness that astonished Mrs. Welby, who was still a little inclined to regard her as an irresponsible child.

Still, it was necessary that Eustace should be examined and inspected before Mrs. Welby felt that she could trust her darling to him, and who should fulfill this graceless task more adroitly than their old friend, Monsignor Fane?

She had a high opinion of his judgment. He was indulgent and charitable, and possessed a knowledge of the world perhaps greater than that of the majority of ecclesiastics.

Mrs. Welby, on her side, was extremely desirous of shifting the responsibility of Nella's marriage upon shoulders more capable of supporting it than her own. It was useless, as she soon discovered, to appeal to Mrs. Dyrham, who regarded the affair solely from a worldly point of view, and considered it quite extraordinarily lucky that Nella should have won the love of Lord Pendre's only son and heir.

Eustace and Nella, in the simple enjoyment of each other's society during those radiant Roman days of early spring, had no knowledge of these designs upon their peace, nor of the anxiety that was perturbing at least one of their elders. They were very happy, very much in love, and quite undisturbed by any preoccupation as to their own future.

2

Eustace was sitting alone in his room at the hotel reading one evening when Monsignor Fane was announced. The priest was ushered in with that abruptness which is so disconcerting in foreign hotels, when the utterance of a name—often grievously mutilated—is speedily followed by the visitor himself.

His heart sank when he saw the dark aquiline face above the narrow rim of purple that designated the monsignore's rank. But he rose and greeted him in his pleasant unembarrassed fashion, a kind of shy eagerness suffusing his face.

He did not know why he was secretly afraid of Monsignor Fane. But always he felt that he knew something more of his parents than he himself knew. Something that was perhaps to their detriment. He had not forgotten that keen, quick questioning to which he had been subjected on the night of Mrs. Dyrham's dinner-party. Nor had he forgotten his own chagrin when the priest rose and abruptly left his side soon after ascertaining his mother's name.

Monsignor Fane took the proffered hand.

"I came to congratulate you, Mr. Wingrave," he said, in his soft pleasant voice. "Mrs. Welby has told me of your engagement to Miss Tresham. May God bless you both! I am glad to think she is to marry a Catholic."

"I'm a very new convert at present," answered Eustace, smiling.

He was relieved to think that the priest had come as a friend, that he approved of the engagement. He pushed a box of cigarettes toward him, and they sat down and smoked for a few minutes in silence.

He became aware then that Monsignor Fane had come to say something to him quite apart from the subject of his marriage, and that he was experiencing a certain difficulty in beginning.

Eustace sat there in silence. All around him it seemed that the shadow drooped and darkened. He felt its presence almost as keenly as he had done at Pendre. And fantastically he wondered whether Monsignor Fane was also aware of it. His dark face was so cold and stern, yet full of purpose and determination. One could see that he was not a man to shrink from any task, however hard and painful, which he considered it his duty to perform.

The blind was drawn up, and they could see the Roman sky, almost black and pierced by myriads of brilliant and frosty stars. Some roofs and chimneys were darkly etched against it in masses of blotted shadow. They could hear the faint stir of traffic far below them, the sharp scraping sound of a passing tram, the shrill hoot of a motor-horn. Just the familiar normal sounds of a great city.

"I imagine," said Monsignor Fane at last, "that you are quite ignorant of your mother's history before her marriage?"

"Not quite ignorant, but she never talks about it, and I hardly know any details."

"Do you wish to know what I can tell you? I think that you might be able to help her."

"Don't tell me anything against her!" exclaimed Eustace, almost with passion.

A cold sick fear clutched his heart. Oh, he was on the brink now of exact knowledge, and he would want all his strength to bear it! Almost, he felt as if he were awaiting a doctor's decision, aware that he was suffering from some dreadful malady that could only be alleviated by a hideous surgical operation. The fear he felt made him at once shiver and burn, as if menthol had been applied to his heart.

All the time, he was aware that Monsignor Fane's dark piercing eyes were fixed upon him with an expression of compassion, almost of tenderness.

"I should never have offered to tell you unless you had become a Catholic. But that makes it almost necessary. I shall not be violating any confidence—the story was pretty well known here nearly thirty years ago."

Eustace maintained a rigid silence. No, he would not help him. He set his teeth, as if he were indeed awaiting the touch of the cold knife . . . .

"Is she happy?"

"I don't think we are any of us what you could call happy. My sister and I have found happiness in other paths. Till now we've never known it."

"You have an apostolate before you," said the priest, steadily, fixing his eyes upon him. "It is your duty to try to bring your mother back to the Faith."

"Back to the Faith!"

"She was a practising Catholic—very good and devout—up till the time of her marriage."

Eustace felt now, that he had always known it. Nothing else and certainly nothing less could have accounted for that complete academical knowledge she had displayed at the time of Vicky's illness, coupled with her shrinking from any participation in the practical side of her daughter's conversion. But what had made her turn abruptly away? Was it because of her love for his father, who refused perhaps to permit her to practise the religion that until then had been dear to her? No—the reason must surely lie more deeply rooted than that. There must be something more, and perhaps he would have to hear it now. For his mother's sake. This was to be his first work as a Catholic. He began to see his conversion in a new light. The thought that he could help her braced him. And he remembered the times when he had believed her to be on the brink of some momentous confession. That reassured him. It would be in no way disloyal for him to listen to Monsignor Fane now. . . .

"She gave up her Faith in order to marry your father," said the priest, quietly. "I knew her then as Miss Kelsey. She wasn't my penitent, but I was called in and asked to try to remonstrate with her—to restrain her."

Eustace leaned his elbows on the table, and hid his face in his hands. He told himself that subconsciously he had always known this thing. Ever since that day, at any rate, when she had caught his crucifix in her hands and kissed the Nailed Feet.

"Why was it necessary for her to give up her Faith? Wouldn't my father make the promises?"

"He wasn't free to marry her in the Catholic Church."

"Not free?"

"His first wife, whom he had divorced as a very young man, was still alive."

"I didn't know that he'd been married before," said Eustace.

"Very few people seem to have known anything of it. There were no children. But according to Catholic law he was not free to marry your mother."

"She has been such a saint," said Eustace, brokenly.

Again he hid his face in the cup of his hands. Something like a sob escaped him. He was enveloped now in the thick dark shadow that for so many years had hung over Pendre. And it was his mother's fault, his mother's doing. Oh, how he must have pierced her to the heart when he told her Vicky's words: "What can we have done to offend Him? What can any of us have done?"

"She was so very young. Only eighteen," he said at last.

Monsignor Fane's eyes rested upon him pityingly. There were many things he could not tell him, but the bare facts of the story had been no secret at the time, and he was betraying no confidence in relating them to Eustace. But he remembered as if it were yesterday, how he himself as a priest, then in his middle thirties, had fought for the soul of Giselda Kelsey. And at one moment it had seemed as if success had crowned his efforts. She had left Rome and gone secretly to Anzio, full of determination to flee from temptation and never to see Hugo Wingrave again. But the sudden illness of her father, then almost at the end of his resources, had summoned her back to Rome. When she arrived, the two men were together.

For her to see Hugo was to fall utterly under the spell of his dominating influence. She was like a hypnotized bird. His rough masterful ways, his brutal strength, his dark formidable face, exercised a kind of unwilling fascination for her. Her own heart was her chief betrayer. She only saw Monsignor Fane once more, and that was to tell him in a cold determined voice that she intended to marry Hugo Wingrave.

There had been enormous pressure used, of course, for Major Kelsey was not the man to let such a prize escape. He accused his daughter of selfishness. Here was an important man, of great and growing wealth, who wished to marry her. Wingrave could place them both forever beyond any financial difficulty; he was even ready to pay off the major's superabundant debts. And for the sake of a miserable scruple she was prepared to send him away. But it had not been, as Monsignor Fane well knew, the old hackneyed story of the daughter sacrificing herself for the sake of bringing wealth and comfort to an invalid and impecunious father. She had fallen in love with Hugo Wingrave. She felt the impossibility of allowing him to go out of her life forever.

Even then Hugo was bigoted and intolerant, but this effort on the part of the Church to separate him from the woman he loved had turned his growing anger to a black and bitter hatred. She should forget the past, he told her. His love would compensate for the sacrifice of these things she had been erroneously taught were necessary for salvation. From the day of her marriage she should never again speak to a priest nor enter a Catholic church. That page must be blotted out from the book of her life. He would have no priests in his house interfering with his private affairs. She was to be his—body and soul. . .

What would this man say when he knew that his only surviving son had become a convert to the religion he hated?

"I think that's why she suffered so terribly when my brother was killed," said Eustace. "Almost—as if it had been her fault."

He rose from his seat and walked restlessly about the room. The lights were swimming and looked blurred and confused.

He seemed to have lost hold of all permanent and stable human things. He was groping in this fearful darkness, wherein his mother seemed like a soul drowning in a deep gulf, crying aloud for his help. . . .

"You never saw her again?" he asked.

"No. She wrote to me once, when she had been married about three years. She asked me not to answer the letter. But she told me that her husband's first wife was dead, and that she had tried to induce him to marry her again in a Catholic church. He refused. Already there were two little children, a boy and a girl. She didn't feel able to leave them. He was more bitterly and fiercely opposed to her religion than ever before. I felt that she wasn't happy—that conscience was beginning to torment her. The glamor of love and wealth had perhaps diminished, had lost something of their value for her, and she was face to face with the consciousness of her own deep offense against Almighty God and His Holy Church. I think she was beginning to see her apostasy, her betrayal, in their true light."

With each successive child the wound must have been reopened. She must have mourned over those little souls whom she had deprived of their immortal heritage. And for herself—what years of starvation and deprivation must have been hers!

As yet Eustace could hardly envisage that long martyrdom which his father's passionate, jealous, and possessive love could have done so little to relieve. She was chained and bound to her sin. Not daring to break away from it because of the children she had borne. Condemned to that complete severance from Christ and His Church. Never the perfect, intimate approach which he had himself savored in all its ineffable sweetness, the loving welcome, the consolation. Knowing how sensitive she was, Eustace perceived more and more clearly, as he contemplated her now, how she must have been tortured by those long years of separation, spiritual imprisonment, unassuageable nostalgia. He saw her now as a beautiful and tragic figure, wandering astray in the wilderness, and he knew what Philip's death must have meant to her. This son who, whatever happened, could never claim on earth his spiritual heritage. This one who had died outside the Fold. . . .

He wanted to go to her at once, to kneel at her feet, and entreat her to return, no matter at what cost. For the moment he felt stronger than his father. Something must be done for her. She mustn't be left like that, perishing of starvation in the wilderness. His father must be made to see that he couldn't keep her any longer on the rack—like a beautiful butterfly pinned to a board. He would go back to Pendre and plead with him. Oh, he must be forced to yield now, this harsh, indomitable man! He must permit her as far as possible to retrieve and repair the past. Eustace felt acutely responsible for his mother. Never before had he loved her with such infinite tenderness, with such plenitude of understanding. Her face rose up before him, so beautiful in its soft perfection of line and coloring. Surely a soul most dear to God. . . .

"Ought I to let this separate me from Nella?" Eustace asked suddenly. It came into his mind then that Monsignor Fane might have had some such motive in seeking him out this evening.

"If you hadn't been a Catholic I should certainly have recommended her not to marry you. But now—" He looked at Eustace with something of admiration. "You can help each other. There's nothing to prevent your marriage."

But even as he spoke he felt a passing regret that Eustace had no vocation for the priesthood. He could have pictured him as an earnest young priest, filled with a fiery zeal. Sometimes the children of an apostate felt impelled to a life of sacrifice and heroic mortification in their desire to repair the sin of their parent. To bear the iniquity of others, and thus conform more closely and perfectly to the pattern of their Divine Master.

"What you have to do is to try and win your mother back," continued the priest, in a slow earnest voice.

"Yes," he assented. "She's always seemed to me like a saint. I used to wonder, thought, at the absence of religion in her life. You see, she never went to church or spoke to us about religion. I remember once when I was very little she refused to hear me say my prayers. I understand it now."

Monsignor Fane's explanation covered everything, even the mystery of the shadow.

In imagination Eustace seemed to see his mother, standing on the threshold of the great door at Pendre, waiting for him, beckoning to him. . . .

"What I believe is that she wants to come back," he added.

"God grant that it may be so."

The priest rose to go. Eustace knelt to receive his blessing.

3

When he found himself alone once more, he felt that he could not bear to remain in the little hotel room with its rather dismal furniture and appurtenances. He put on his hat and coat and went out into the Roman night, all cold, pure dark blue with the scattered stars overhead.

The chill wind touched him like frozen fingers, bracing his nerves. He wandered and wandered for hours through the lighted crowded streets before going back to the hotel. All the time he scarcely gave a thought to Nella. It was his mother, whose haunting presence seemed to be with him, possessing all his heart and brain with an almost cruel domination.

It was late when he returned, and he saw a letter from his mother lying on the table in his room. He picked it up and glanced hastily at it. As he opened the envelope a newspaper cutting slipped out and fell upon the floor. He retrieved it, and the heading of the paragraph caught his eye. It was as follows:

ONLY SON OF WELL-KNOWN PEER TURNS MONK

"We learn on good authority from a correspondent in Rome that the Honorable Eustace Wingrave, only surviving son of Lord Pendre, was recently received into the Catholic Church during his sojourn in the Eternal City, and that it is his intention to enter the priesthood and seek for admittance into the Benedictine Order."

The scrap of paper fell from Eustace' hand. He turned with a sense of almost sick suspense to his mother's letter.

"Darling Eustie," it ran, *"Barbara sent me this cutting—or rather she sent it to your father—this morning. Of course he is terribly upset about it, and says if it is true, he will never have you in the house again. You know he never allows Vicky and Martin to come here, and I am only able to see her when I go to Hill Street, which is very seldom. I have only had one little glimpse of her since her return from the South of France; she is looking stronger and better than I have ever seen her. And so perfectly happy.*

"Eustie darling, when you told me last spring that you wanted to learn more about God, I hoped and prayed that you might find your way into the Catholic Church. And you have done so. I wanted this for you even though I felt that it might mean separation from myself, and the ruin of your temporal career. But you have always seemed to me one who could bear poverty better than riches. You had other ideals. I can only tell you how deeply I approve of your choice. But is it true that you mean to be a priest—a Benedictine? I should be the last to try to dissuade you from a path which of all ways spells the fullest perfection. Only, you mustn't decide anything in a hurry. In fact, I believe the Catholic Church insists upon a convert's waiting a year or two before entering the religious life.

"You knew, I think, what this step would mean in regard to your future. Your father's attitude toward the Church is no secret to you. He bore Vicky's conversion better than I expected, but it came at an hour of acute anxiety when we hardly thought she could live . . . With a daughter, too, it is perhaps a little different. But you are now his only son. He was beginning to make plans for your succeeding to all that should have been Philip's. I know these things could never weigh at all with you, and yet I am sorry that you must forfeit them, in spite of all the intense happiness I am feeling now at your conversion.

"Write to me, dear Eustie. Tell me—everything! Do not think that this can ever separate us. If I could tell you all, you would know that we are closer than we have ever been before. God bless you, my dear, dear son . . .

Your loving mother,
G. P.

"P. S. Pamela came to us yesterday evening and told us of her engagement to Ernest Soames. They will be married soon after Easter. I wonder if you have seen anything of Mrs. Dyrham? I hear she is in Rome with Miss Tresham."

Eustace read and re-read his mother's letter. It seemed to breathe a tenderness, a solicitude, that calmed and soothed and reassured him. So she knew and approved. She would have approved even if he had taken that momentous further step of which the gossiping paragraph had spoken.

But who could have written it? Who could have broadcasted his intimate private affairs in this fashion? Were the doings of Lord Pendre's son and heir of such particular importance to the world at large? He could not believe it. He was sorry now that he had shown an apparent want of confidence in his mother by not telling her of his reception the moment it had taken place. He could not bear to think she had learnt of it from another source.

But he would write to her at once—he would tell her everything. Everything, that is to say, that concerned himself—his conversion, his engagement to Nella Tresham. He would make no mention of Monsignor Fane and his disclosures. That could be done best by word of mouth when he saw her again.

She had not said much about his father's anger, nor of the effect the news had had upon him. But he could read between the lines. If Vicky was not permitted to go to Pendre how much more rigorous would be his own exile from home? There was no post awaiting him at Wingrave's now. He would have to look in future to his own efforts for the gaining of a livelihood. But it was only on Nella's account that he felt the smallest regret, and because, too, in the far future he would not be able to restore the old chapel at Pendre.

4

Monsignor Fane's verdict was favorable. Eustace Wingrave had made an excellent impression upon him. The priest, however, gave Mrs. Welby no details of that interview. It was no part of his duty or intention to relate to her that story—now nearly thirty years old—of Giselda Kelsey's marriage. Eustace could if he chose communicate that melancholy history to Nella.

Monsignor Fane visited Mrs. Welby on the following day, and found her alone. Mrs. Dyrham was visiting friends, and the young people had gone for a drive along the Via Appia.

But Mrs. Dyrham had also received a copy of the paragraph concerning Eustace, and was inclined to consider it impertinent rather than dangerous. It had, however, perturbed Mrs. Welby, and she displayed it now with some eagerness.

"You know we're dreadfully afraid it may have a very bad effect upon Lord Pendre," she said.

"I have reason to believe that he's a very bigoted man," observed the priest, gravely. "I doubt if this boy will inherit more than the empty title. Still, that's really no reason why he shouldn't marry Nella. The young people seem very devotedly attached to each other—it will be a good Catholic marriage for them both."

"But Nella has practically nothing. Fifty pounds a year at the outside. Are you going to advise them to marry on that?"

Mrs. Welby had coped with tradesmen's books and bills in her day; thus her despondent attitude toward domestic budgets was the outcome of stern experience.

"Eustace has two hands and a sound head. Let him work. It won't hurt him."

"It's not so easy to find a job," murmured Mrs. Welby. She was obstinately pessimistic, and felt that she had a right to be, for she knew Lord Pendre very intimately indeed, by repute.

"They talk of getting married directly after Easter," she added.

"Well, I see no objection to that, except that Easter isn't till the sixteenth of April. They've got nearly two months to wait."

"But that's an extraordinarily short engagement. And with this uncertainty about his prospects—"

The priest smiled. "I presume that Wingrave has enough to keep them both till he can find work. Poverty never hurt anyone that I can see."

Mrs. Welby sighed. Of course she wouldn't have liked darling Nella to marry Eustace unless he had been a Catholic, but it seemed sad that in order to possess the one thing, he was compelled to forfeit all his very substantial worldly possessions. Poor children—they didn't in the least realize what they were doing. And it was useless to counsel prudence to

Nella—she was very much in love and would hear no talk of delay.

"It's odd," she remarked, "that these Wingrave children who've been brought up practically without religion and in an atmosphere of bigotry, should turn to the Faith in this way. There's his sister Vicky, you know—such a stormy little creature, utterly unmanageable, Mrs. Dyrham always told me—she insisted upon becoming a Catholic when she was supposed to be dying of typhoid in Brighton last autumn. She's married to a young convert—Major Sedgwick. Lord Pendre of course could say nothing because the girl was thought to be dying at the time. He never liked her—I've been told he used to beat her when she was a little girl."

"Really?" He had summed up Lord Pendre as an obstinate, bigoted, but not a cruel man. The information caused him a pang of dismay. Had Lady Pendre's life been a happy one, with this fierce, dominating man? Had she suffered at seeing her children ill-treated? Had she paid dearly and twice over for the possession of that vast wealth, that important position?

"It seems almost as if the Catholic religion were in their blood," remarked Mrs. Welby.

"Perhaps it is," he answered guardedly.

"Of course where there's martyr's blood in the family they always say there are converts in every generation!"

"Well, one can understand that."

"Lord Pendre is a materialist. I've heard the house reeks of money. I've never been inside it."

"An old Catholic property, wasn't it?"

"Yes. It belonged for centuries to the various branches of the Chittenden family. Lord Pendre bought it after old Mrs. Chittenden's death. He was Mr. Wingrave then—he took his title from the place."

"Well, I still hope that some day it may be in Catholic hands again."

"Oh, you don't know Lord Pendre if you think he'll ever leave a farthing to a Catholic!" She shook her head. "These children were never allowed to know each other. We met them for the first time on Moth Hill last spring, just after

Eustace had come back from Iraq. Nella declares she fell in love with him then . . . but that's only a silly school-girlish idea. She's such a baby, still, in many ways. Only, he says the same thing, so I suppose there must have been a strong mutual attraction."

Mrs. Welby sighed. She didn't approve of these boy and girl marriages that had become so frequent and fashionable since the War. People ought to wait until they had an assured income, or at least some experience of the cost of things. Eustace and Nella seemed to her quite extravagantly reckless. They ought to wait at least a year—two years—.

It was very disappointing to find that Monsignor Fane should be so strongly on their side. But priests, too, were often very ignorant about money. . . .

"Eustace made a most favorable impression upon me," remarked Monsignor Fane. "I think he would make any girl happy. They are lucky to have found each other."

"I do hope Mrs. Dyrham will really carry out her intention of giving Nella a little *dot*. People often talk in that generous way, but it means nothing."

"I am told," he assured her smiling, "that many young couples in these days, manage to live for the first year on the checks they receive for wedding-presents."

"Not when they get married in a hole-and-corner way abroad, as these intend to do. People generally make that an excuse for forgetting to send them anything at all."

"Well, we must hope for the best," he observed smiling, seeing that it was useless to try to cheer her, in her present mood of determined pessimism.

But afterward when he left her, he saw Eustace and Nella driving slowly along the crowded Corso on their way home. He only caught a glimpse of their happy, smiling faces, but that glimpse reassured him. There was something almost romantic about their glowing youth, their radiant happiness. And there was stern stuff in Eustace too. He knew that in submitting to the Church, he had renounced his "great possessions." And he had not hesitated. Surely the great grace of helping to bring his mother back to the Fold would not be denied him. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

The Lifting of the Shadow

1

THE wedding took place very quietly in Rome on a day of mid-April. Monsignor Fane officiated, and only Mrs. Welby, Mrs. Dyrham and the Cravens were present.

Eustace had written to his mother directly the date was fixed, and had received rather a wistful reply in return. They had corresponded with great frequency since his engagement; in their letters a new note was discernible—a note of greater intimacy and understanding and confidence.

Eustace had written to his father to tell him of his approaching marriage, but he had received no reply. This silence chilled him; it seemed to augur ill for the future.

They wandered through Umbria during a wonderful month when Italy was like a vast garden of flowers bathed in golden sunshine, dividing her two blue seas. It was a dream of enchantment, and sometimes Eustace found it difficult to realize that it was something more than a dream. For Nella herself had a spirit-like quality that was not quite of earth—more than anyone he had ever met she seemed to be truly compounded of "spirit, fire and dew." She was like a happy child, strayed down from heaven, young even for her twenty years, a thing of flame and air. . . .

"Sometimes I feel as if I should never hold you!" he told her one day, when they were wandering among the golden vineyards of the Umbrian hills and vales.

The sun was very bright for May, and the air seemed full of little burning crystals that stung and dazzled his eyes. Nella, looking very slender and girlish in her thin white dress, was dancing along by his side.

Something in her Italian blood made her revel instinctively in this splendid golden sunlight; it almost intoxicated her.

"You've no need to hold me, Eustie," she whispered; "the difficulty would be if you ever tried to push me away!"

She was suddenly serious, and in her seriousness there was a sweetness that seemed to transcend every other.

When he looked at her now, he wished he could keep her always in Italy. She seemed to belong to this golden burning land of sunshine and flowers. But their holiday was already coming to an end. He would have to go back to England and seek for work. His gratuity, as well as Nella's slender store of money, was quickly becoming exhausted. They were extremely improvident, as poor Mrs. Welby had foreseen.

A letter from his mother about this time, somewhat disturbed him, and made him secretly determine to go back as soon as he could. As yet he had told Nella nothing of her history, a sense of loyalty kept him silent on the subject. He couldn't bear the thought of lowering her, even if ever so little, in Nella's eyes.

The letter informed him that Lady Pendre had been in London for a few weeks, and that she was staying quite alone in Hill Street for the present. It had been a great joy to see Vicky again; she and Martin were ideally happy. He was doing well in his new appointment. But in spite of all this, Eustace had the disquieting conviction that "something" must have happened. It was very unlike his mother to stay in Hill Street for so long alone. Even to see Vicky . . . And he discerned in her letter certain puzzling reticences. She did not allude to her return home, nor say how long she intended to remain in London. From beginning to end of the letter there was no mention of his father.

Had she left Pendre? Had she found the separation—both physical and spiritual—from her children—impossible to bear?

At the end of the letter she had written:

"Please let me know when you will be in London, and come and see me as soon as possible. I am longing to know your Nella."

When he had got thus far, he turned to his wife and read aloud that significant little postscript.

"Oh, I do want you to know her. You're sure to love each other!" he exclaimed eagerly.

But even then he could not tell her of his mother's tragedy. It belonged to her; he had no right to repeat it to anyone in the world.

"I hope she'll like me, Eustie," smiled Nella.

"She'll love you," Eustace assured her.

"As much as she loved Pamela?"

"Much more. I don't believe she ever really cottoned to Pamela. She wasn't her sort. She was kind to her for Phip's sake. What a comfort to feel that Pamela is Mrs. Ernest Soames now!"

They had read the announcement of the wedding, in the English papers.

As far as Eustace could tell, his father must be quite alone at Pendre. Alone in that great, deserted, shadowed house. It seemed to him now a house of ghosts. . . .

2

They were back in London early in June, leaving Italy with that passionate regret which all her ardent lovers feel, and that is so incomprehensible to those who do not appreciate her.

Eustace found some inexpensive lodgings, whither they moved the day after their arrival in town. They were not nice enough for Nella, but she was quite happy; she didn't seem to mind. She was still at that stage when to be with Eustace was sufficient happiness.

He had telegraphed to his mother, telling her they would come and see her in the afternoon. Somehow he felt that the interview would be rather a momentous one. Nella refused to accompany him at first, but Eustace entreated her to do so.

"But she'll want to talk to you alone. I shall only be in the way."

"You won't. Why, she wants to see you more than she wants to see me!"

"Well, you mustn't mind if I go away and leave you together after a bit," she compromised.

As the hour of their appointment drew near Eustace grew visibly restless. He was to see his mother again for the first time since he had acquired this new definite knowledge that had given him his present clear and lucid conception of her. Some day—not to-day perhaps—he would have to tell her all that he knew, and he recoiled from the thought of inflicting such pain upon her. How much she had suffered in the past—how much she must still be suffering—he found it impossible to conjecture. Conscience, like any other part of one's moral or physical equipment, can be atrophied from long disuse and repression. It was conceivable, therefore, that during the past twenty-seven years she had learned to hush its insistent voice. But there must be in the lives of all apostate Catholics an occasional and disconcerting uprush from those subconscious stores of spirituality conserved from the devout years of faith . . . Such an uprush she must certainly have known at the moment when the news of Philip's death had reached her. *It was I who killed him* . . . She had realized then that she had deprived him of his spiritual inheritance, that she had denied him all that Catholic equipment which could have prepared him so perfectly for eternal life. He was good and brave, but she had not taught him to be anything more. He had never been initiated into the Catholic rule of life, into Catholic faith and practice.

And again when Eustace had disclosed to her his own spiritual difficulties, destined by God's mercy to be solved by Catholicism, she must have thought of those years when she herself had known and loved the Truth—the Truth that she had betrayed and denied. . . . She must have remembered then, and perhaps his words had wounded her, like a sharp surgical instrument delicately probing an exposed nerve. . . .

When they came into the room Lady Pendre was already sitting there. But the house had not apparently been prepared in any way for her advent. It was just as if she had come up by chance in August on a passing visit, for the pictures were swathed in newspapers, the furniture in brown holland. The carpets had been removed, and only a few shabby rugs covered the floor. It was so dismal, this room that Eustace always remembered as so beautiful, now that it was shorn of the books and china and flowers and pretty bibelots Lady Pendre liked to have about her.

At once he thought: "Something *has* happened. Why, she's living here as if she never expected anyone to come and see her!" He was sorry, too, that Nella should see her for the first time in this cheerless dismantled room.

There was no change in his mother's habitually passive attitude, that yet never suggested indolence, since her face, always so meditative and thoughtful, held that immutable aspect of deep and brooding mental activity.

"Mother—this is Nella!" he said, all shy eagerness, his great eyes burning like shadowed lamps beneath the heavy overhanging brows. He watched anxiously the meeting between the two women. It must always be, he felt, something of an effort for a woman to greet her unknown daughter-in-law.

But Lady Pendre took Nella in her arms and kissed her tenderly.

"I've wanted so to see you—" she said.

Nella was modern, simple, unembarrassed. But she was aware even then of the strange haunting beauty and charm of Eustace' mother. It even made her feel a little uncouth and unfinished.

"Are you going to be in London long?" asked Eustace, his eyes involuntarily surveying the room.

"Perhaps—a few weeks—" she answered evasively.

"How on earth did you wangle leave from Dad?"

"Barbara's staying with him. And then the Soameses are just back at Moth Hill." She seemed to be aware that these replies cast no light upon an obscure situation.

Eustace longed to hear more. Had there been a crisis—a decisive breaking away? Had she felt the position to be no longer tenable? The thought made him anxious.

"Isn't Dad coming up, then?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so. He has a great deal to do at Pendre just now."

Tea was brought in, but Eustace noticed that the footman was not one of the Pendre servants. Probably he was a "job" man, hired temporarily.

So far he was only in possession of the bare facts, that she was here alone, and that Barbara was staying at Pendre with her father. Perhaps she would tell him more when they were alone. Nella, quick to perceive that her presence was an obstacle to complete confidence, rose directly she had finished her tea.

"Eustie—I'm going to the Oratory. There's Benediction—I shall be just in time. Meet me there later—I'll wait for you."

She kissed Lady Pendre again, waved her hand to Eustace in farewell and went out of the room. Her going was a slight relief. Eustace immediately crossed the room and sat beside his mother on the sofa.

Lady Pendre looked at him.

"She's charming, Eustie, and so pretty."

"Yes, isn't she? I knew you'd love her. But tell me about . . . Dad."

"Oh, Eustie. . . ."

"Not if it's going to hurt you," he whispered.

"You'll have to know sometime. Only, it's so hard to tell you now."

"Is it? But perhaps I do know a little already. Wouldn't that make it easier?"

Nevertheless fear touched him with cold fingers. Perhaps there was yet something new, something more terrible to learn. His heart sank.

She looked at him sorrowfully.

"You can't possibly know what I'm going to tell you. Perhaps I shall never go back to Pendre."

"Why on earth not? It's no fault of yours if Vicky and I choose to become Catholics—to marry Catholics?"

She was silent.

"But what have *you* done?" he almost gasped.

The revelation was very close now; it might help her perhaps to hear the extent of his own knowledge.

"Can't you guess, Eustie? Hasn't it ever occurred to you?"

"Tell me," he said, even now supposing that he was in ignorance of some terrible and vital fact concerning her—a fact perhaps wholly unconnected with all that he had learned in Rome.

"I want to come back," she said simply.

"To come back?" he echoed.

"Yesterday I saw a priest. That's why I left Pendre. I couldn't bear it another day—another hour. Knowing that you and Vicky were waiting for me on the other side."

He was silent, but he took her hand in his and held it in a warm and comforting grasp.

"I hadn't been to confession for more than twenty-seven years," she said.

"And you've been now?"

"Yes. The Church is very merciful. . . ."

"Because Almighty God is merciful," said Eustace.

"Eustie, did you never suspect? Sometimes I thought you did."

"I wouldn't let myself think it was that," he answered. "But when I was in Rome—when Nella and I were first engaged—I met Monsignor Fane. He told me. He begged me to pray for you."

He bent down and kissed her hand with a sort of reverent homage. The gesture showed her better than any words how little this knowledge had affected his great love for her.

"It made me understand the shadow—" he added.

"The shadow. . . ." She stared blankly in front of her. Then she said: "You see, it meant my leaving your father."

"But—his first wife is dead, isn't she?"

"Ours was never a marriage in the eyes of the Church. And he refuses to go through a second ceremony in a Catholic church."

So the long conflict was at an end. Lord Pendre had been defeated by the very forces he believed that he had crushed and overcome. . . .

"I just had to come away. It was a wrench," she added simply.

He had often wondered what her real attitude to his father was. But he had never been able to see beyond her silence, her deep indisputable loyalty as a wife. These seemed to him the invincible qualities of her nature. Did she care, now that the long bond between herself and her husband was broken? Was it a relief? Or had it torn her heart to go away and leave him, in response to this higher spiritual claim? For twenty-seven years—more than half her lifetime—they had shared joy and sorrow together. That alone created an intimacy that perhaps nothing could destroy.

And his father? . . . How had he accepted this decision of hers What was his attitude in the face of this dire domestic disaster and disruption? Eustace had never for a moment doubted the love of this fierce, hard, unscrupulous man for the woman he had made his wife. He must be suffering now. Love and pride must surely be fighting a death-and-life conflict within him. But he had let her go . . . Pride had so far proved the victor. One by one he had suffered first his two younger children and then his wife to leave him, emancipating themselves from the shadow that brooded over Pendre. . . .

Yes, he had let her go. And it would have been so easy, on the face of it, for him to fulfil the one condition she had laid down and upon which alone she could remain.

Perhaps he was sitting in solitude at Pendre now, nervously conscious of the shadow that had obscured in some sense the whole happiness of his married life. Could Barbara's presence compensate in the least degree for the loss of the wife he had loved, for the son dead in his youth, for the two children deliberately seeking life and happiness in alien paths? How could he, indeed, bear the absence of the woman whom conscience had driven at last back to the Church, beyond his love and care?

When Eustace thought of his father now, of the man he had feared and almost disliked and yet whom he had admired for his cool ruthlessness, it was with a passion of pity.

"He *must* come to his senses. He'll never stand life without you—"

"We can't expect miracles to happen. Perhaps I deserve this—this punishment." Her voice was steady and quite emotionless. "Somehow, I felt when Phip was killed that things couldn't go on as they were for much longer. And then when you and Vicky had both left us—"

She stopped, gazing at Eustace. As yet she knew few details of his spiritual journey, only just what he had told her in his letters. But she felt that, placed as he had been, it couldn't have been very easy. The first response to grace is not often given without a struggle. And he had known that he would have to sell all that he had to purchase that pearl without price. The years of his youth, too, had been empty of all preparation for that supreme hour of great gain and great renunciation. . . .

"You're happy?" she asked him, suddenly.

"Perfectly happy, as far as I myself am concerned. You see, I've got everything. Faith—Nella—" He stopped abruptly. "It's only when I think of you that I'm unhappy."

"Don't think of me, Eustie. I deserve everything. God can never punish me enough for my faithlessness."

"You were very young—there was that excuse."

"Yes, and my father was ill and suffering—we'd come to the end of all our money. To him it seemed like Providence that your father should arrive in Rome just then and fall in love with me. It wasn't till later that I knew about the divorced wife. I spoke to my father—he gave me no help—he wanted the money and said so. I knew I was doing wrong, and I did it deliberately." She touched her breast. "I wished to marry your father. I loved him. Monsignor Fane tried to prevent it. Once he nearly succeeded. I went away—down to Anzio—my father became very ill and sent for me. And I was glad to go back. When I got home your father was there. . . ."

But he could only think of her as young, alone, deeply loving, and having to cope with this terrific problem.

"Afterward Hugo was afraid that I might have remorse and leave him. That was why he kept me away from any chance of meeting a priest or going into a Catholic church. He grew to hate the Catholic Church as something that continually menaced his happiness. Then the children began to come . . . Philip . . . Barbara. . . . He had them all christened by a Church of England clergyman the day they were born. He was bigoted, to begin with, but afterward he was obsessed by a kind of personal hatred and fear. Just as if he could foresee that some day this—this would happen."

"Isn't there any way out?"

"Not with your father."

"Does Vicky know?"

"Yes, I told her a few days ago. But it seems Martin had guessed that there was something of the kind."

Eustace caressed her hand.

"You must come and live with us," he said. "I'll work for you as well as for Nella. Dad won't want me at Wingrave's now, of course—he's too fed up with me. But I'll get a job somehow. Nella and I don't care about money. We just want enough to live on."

"We must see, dear. But I think for a time I should like to live very quietly in a convent. I might pay you a visit sometimes."

"We shall look for a little villa," he said, "just a tiny banal sort of place, with a square garden back and front. Emptyish rooms with whitewashed walls—no dark corners anywhere. Everything terribly simple and clean." His eyes shone.

"Banal—emptyish—simple and clean. . . ." She felt in those words his deep revolt against Pendre and its shadow. She couldn't blame him. He wanted to emancipate himself completely from the traditions of his childhood. He had never wished to be an "eldest son." Between himself and his father there was a whole world of difference, in material as well as in spiritual things. His rebellion had always been deep-rooted in other soil than that of mere incompatibility.

Over and over again one noticed that the young desired to reconstruct life on a new simplicity of basis. The old standards had been tried and found wanting. It was only the old that wished to return to the conditions of a pre-War world.

"I daresay your father will leave Pendre to Barbara and little Philip," she said presently. "I'm afraid it will go hardly for you and Vicky in the future."

In his present irreconcilable mood she knew that her husband was capable of going to any extreme.

"Oh, we're young. It won't hurt either Martin or myself to work. And now I've got Nella, I must work hard." He smiled, and a look of great peace and contentment illuminated his face. "I'd even go into Wingrave's for her sake, but there's no chance of that now!"

He rose and, stooping, kissed her.

"I must push off or I shall keep Nella waiting. But I'll look in to-morrow—"

She put out her arms and pulled him downward until his face touched hers.

"Darling Eustie," she murmured, very softly.

Now that the old dividing barriers were destroyed, she felt that she could show him at last how dear he was. Infinitely, preciously dear. . . .

He kissed her and went out of the room.

3

Lady Pendre was alone. Eustace and Vicky had lunched with her that day—Eustace full of an excellent appointment that seemed to have fallen from heaven, almost unasked. True, it would bind him to a city office for many hours in the week, but what did that matter if he could earn enough to keep Nella and himself in the cottage of his dreams? Afterward he would perhaps be able to hear of some opening in one of the colonies where they could lead a freer, more outdoor life. But he wanted to remain in England for the present; he felt that his mother might need him. He hesitated to leave her so completely alone. . . .

More than a month had passed since she had left Pendre. It was July now, and for some days she had found it very hot and airless in London, for she was unused to town life and rather disliked it.

Even now she could hardly bring herself to rehearse mentally that final scene with her husband. But he had at least made her realize its finality. If she took the step she proposed to take, of reconciliation with her Church, there could be no other outcome. There must be, he assured her, no retracing of footsteps. He would never forgive her. And then she had very quietly told him that when the step was taken she must leave Pendre. She could not remain under his roof any longer. She was legally his wife, but her marriage in the eyes of the Church had been no marriage at all. Until he consented to go through a second ceremony they must remain apart.

And then slowly he had realized what she was trying to tell him. She intended to leave him. Her religion was the rock upon which their ship had foundered. Had he not always known that it might be? Had he not perceived its danger when he had tried to keep her from all contact with it? But destiny had fought against him at the time of Vicky's illness.

Giselda had chosen between him and her religion. And she had made up her mind to cut the knot and return to the practice of her faith. Only on certain conditions could she return to him, and he was little likely to comply with them. Perhaps, indeed, in this last and most poignant struggle his love for her had perished too. . . .

During that month no word of him had reached her. Barbara had written once or twice, little cold letters in which there was never any mention of her father. Perhaps indeed he had requested her not to mention him—he wished the silence between them to be complete. In any case Lady Pendre was utterly ignorant as to what was passing in her husband's mind.

It might be that he would take legal steps to induce her to return to him, believing that the mere threat of a publicity she so dreaded might actuate her to comply with his desire that she should come back. But from her knowledge of him, she believed it was more likely that he would simply suffer this silence to continue, and live on alone, alienated from her and from his two younger children. He would simply cast her out of his life, only caring that she should have sufficient money to keep her from actual want.

Tea had just been brought in. She had half hoped that Vicky, either alone or with Martin, would appear, to keep her company. She was feeling a little lonely, and she had only a few more days in which it would be possible for her to see her children. She had made all arrangements to leave London during the following week, and stay in a convent in rather a lonely part of Yorkshire.

The tea was cleared away. The hours wore on. The July day, bright and golden with burning sunlight, was drawing to a close. Lady Pendre was so immersed in thought that she did not hear a step upon the stairs. But the sound of the door being abruptly opened aroused her. She looked up and saw her husband advancing toward her.

If he had been a ghost she could not have feared him more. Already she seemed to feel the lash of his harsh and wounding words falling upon her like so many bitter blows. But as he came nearer in the deepening twilight she saw that he was very pale. His dark hard-hewn face had something of the curious enigmatic expression of a waxen death-mask.

"Giselda," he said, and his voice seemed to break on the word.

She rose, trembling, and went toward him. She realized that he had not returned in anger. A faintness came over her, blurring his face a little.

"Yes, Hugo? Do you want anything?"

Her voice was not quite steady. His very presence had begun to weave the old spell. She could see herself, a girl, hurrying back from Anzio to find him there, sitting with her father. The day when the die had been cast, and the seed sown for this bitter harvest.

He had always been able to make her feel weak, a little helpless.

"I want you!" The words fell from his lips like pistol shots. "You must come back to Pendre! I can't live without you. We've never been parted before." His great black eyes seemed to devour her hungrily, and across the harsh tones, rough and abrupt, she was sensible of a relenting tenderness. She knew now that he had always loved her; it was his love that had made him hate and fear those very things that were capable of separating them.

Even now she could hardly believe that he had really come. She had had many wild and fantastic dreams of the future, but never this one. Never that he would return, and perhaps plead and relent. Almost, she had believed that his long love for her was dead, that she had slain it with her own hands.

But her decision was made. No one knew what it had cost her. They had only seen the cold determination with which she had finally cut the knot.

She tottered to a seat. He came nearer and stood in front of her, still not touching her. Almost as if he had no right.

"Hugo—you had better know it at once. I have seen a priest—I've been to confession. I've done what I could to atone for my apostasy."

She watched him as she spoke. But there was no sign of anger in his miserable haggard face.

"Do you think I care? You can do whatever you like, only come back to me, Giselda! Our children have left us. Barbara's getting bored at Pendre, and Gerard wants her to go to Norway with him. The others have chosen their own paths. I tried to keep them from your Church, even from all knowledge of it. If I were at all superstitious I should think that something stronger than myself had controlled and guided them. You said once it was in their blood. Perhaps that explains it. But I don't want to speak of their rebellion now. Only come back to me."

His voice had lost nothing of its sternness, of its iron control. His black eyes were somber and hard, his face was like a stone mask, rough-hewn and clumsily modeled. She knew now that all those weeks, since her departure from Pendre, he had been struggling against the claims of that love that had been perhaps, after all, the supreme passion of his life.

"No," she said, "I can't come back. You'll never agree to the only condition upon which I could return to you. And I can't be separated from my children. I love them." She lifted her eyes to his face.

He came a step nearer.

"Giselda!"

She was silent. How long could she let him plead in vain?

"Any conditions," he said. "Whatever you like. Only come back. . . ."

"You'd agree to that second ceremony in a Catholic church?"

He bowed his head in assent.

"And you'll forgive the children—let them come to Pendre whenever they want to? I can't be separated from them. Since I've been in London I've seen them all—Martin and Vicky, Eustace and Nella. Vicky and Eustace have become Catholics of their own free will. I did nothing to help them. I had to stand aside. I know you always feared it." There was a faint break in her voice. She believed that now, when he heard her conditions thus explicitly declared, he would turn away and leave her. He could never bend his neck to such a hard yoke as that.

"If I go back to Pendre they must be allowed to come and see me," she added.

There was a little silence, and then he came and sat beside her on the sofa and put his arms about her. She felt his kisses on her face. Never in all the long years of their married life had she seen him in such a softened mood.

"If I hadn't been ready to give in do you think I should be here now? Giselda, we've been married too long to waste words. Make your own plans, and then when we're settled again at Pendre the children can come whenever they like. You shall have every opportunity of practicing your religion. Tell Eustace he can go to Wingrave's if he wants to. Have it all your own way, my darling. Come back on any terms . . . Only come. . . ."

THE END

Printed by Benziger Brothers, New York

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36–38 Barclay St.

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